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PERSONAL REMINISCENCES OF AUGUSTE RODIN

ANTHONY M. LUDOVICI

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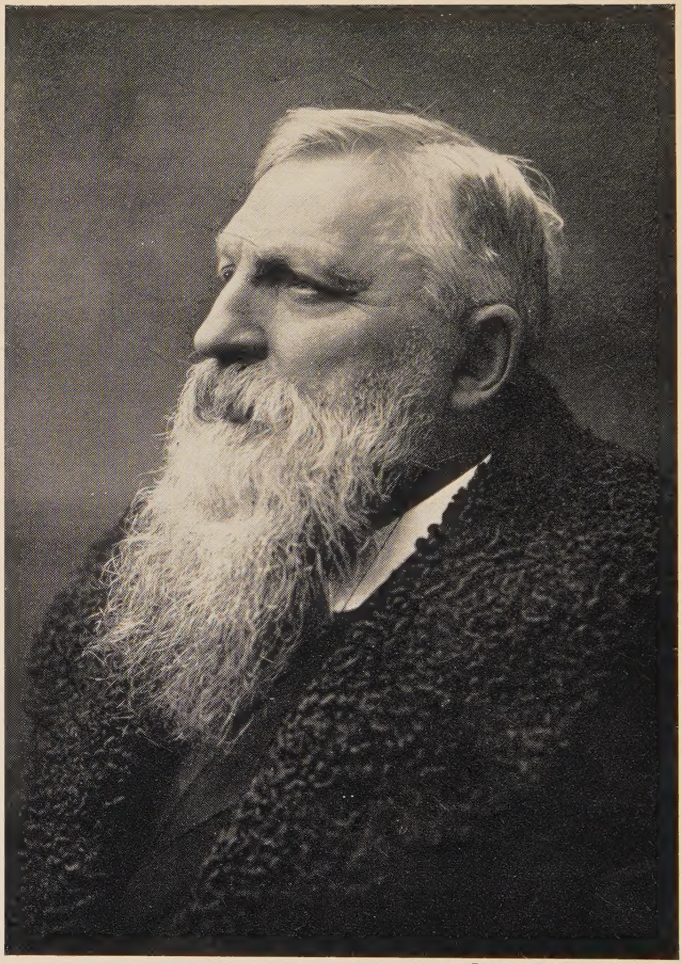

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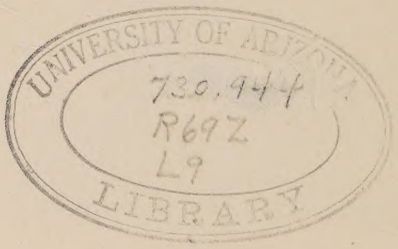
AUGUSTE RODIN AS THE AUTHOR KNEW HIM.

PERSONAL REMINISCENCES OF AUGUSTE RODIN

BY ANTHONY M. LUDOVICI

PHILADELPHIA
J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY
1926



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PREFACE

With the exception of the biographical matter in the first chapter, and the critical comments and bibliography at the end, the whole of the following pages have been written from notes made during my close association with Rodin as his private secretary in the year 1906. The middle chapters, which contain the bulk of my personal reminiscences, were published in the *Cornhill Magazine* in July and August, 1923, December, 1925, and January and February, 1926, and I am glad of the opportunity offered me here of cordially thanking the Editor of that magazine for his kindness in allowing me to reprint them.

Apart from the articles written for the *Cornhill*, and now published in book form for the first time, I have not published anything about Rodin, except a short article written seventeen years ago for a more or less obscure newspaper for young men.

I always look back upon my time with Rodin as one of the most interesting and happy of my life; for while in 1906 I was old enough fully to appreciate the privilege of being his secretary, and thoroughly to enjoy his own company and

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that of his many distinguished friends, I was also sufficiently young to receive very vivid impressions of all I saw and heard, and to retain a very lively memory of my experiences.

What made my sojourn at Meudon particularly pleasant was that my mother was able to live quite close to me—at the Hôtel de la Mairie, Meudon Val Fleury—during practically the whole period of my employment as Rodin's secretary; for thus it was that the long evenings, which, owing to Rodin's habit of retiring early to bed, would otherwise have been very lonely, and my Sundays (for I never worked for Rodin on Sunday) became the occasion for many a pleasant excursion to Paris and other places in the neighbourhood, in my mother's company.

Naturally, the position could not be regarded as a permanent one from my point of view; but, as a unique and invaluable experience, it was sufficiently attractive to tempt me to cross the Channel, at least for a while; and I remained with Rodin until the end of 1906.

In many respects, the duties I had to discharge were not only difficult and exacting, but also demanded a degree of patience and self-effacement of which I confess I was not capable. It is never an easy task to be associated, except on terms of equality, with a man of genius. As de Quincey says, " Men of extraordinary genius

and force of mind are far better as objects for distant admiration than as daily companions";* and as time went on the marked differences in our natures and outlook began, as is usual in such circumstances, to assume larger proportions than the many common interests and tastes which had at first endeared us to each other.

I am not pretending that the faults were not very largely on my own side. On the contrary, I know too well that they were; for without, I believe, being remiss in my actual duties, I found it impossible in the long run to maintain that attitude of unflinching sympathy, tolerance and devotion, which a man of Rodin's temperament and age at the time I joined him naturally expects from an assistant, and which he certainly did obtain from many of the women friends that surrounded him. When, therefore, after Christmas, 1906, Rodin and I came to the conclusion that we could no longer pull together happily, the feeling of relief was certainly shared by us both; and although for many reasons I regretted having to leave him, I was convinced that I was not altogether the assistant he needed.

We parted on perfectly friendly terms. But I never had the good fortune to see him again.

* *The Collected Writings of Thomas de Quincey* (London, A. and C. Black), vol. iii., p. 197.

I can only hope that the following pages, which record my impressions of his personality and his work, may be regarded as a not unfit tribute to the memory of one whose immense services to art, and particularly to sculpture—at a time when both were not in the very best repute—can never be forgotten so long as Western civilisation survives.

ANTHONY M. LUDOVICI.

London,
January, 1926.

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PERSONAL REMINISCENCES OF AUGUSTE RODIN

CHAPTER I

RODIN'S LIFE AND WORKS

Auguste Rodin was born on November 14, 1840, at No. 3, Rue de l'Arbalète, in the Mouffetard quarter of Paris. His father, Jean Baptiste Rodin, a Norman, was thirty-eight years of age at the time of Auguste's birth, and his mother, who came from Lorraine, was twenty-four. Jean Baptiste was a clerk in the offices of the Prefecture of the Seine. Rodin himself seems to have spoken of him as an "inspector of police," employed administratively in a prison (*maison de répression*) at St. Denis.* Until he was about nine years of age, Rodin attended a school in the Rue St. Jacques; but, after that, although his parents could ill afford it, they sent him to a school kept by his uncle at Beauvais, where he remained until he was fourteen. Although he was fond of drawing, he appears to have shown but little aptitude for it at this time, and was quite uncertain about the choice of a career. For a while he even fancied he might be a public speaker. At all events, he displayed

* See Marcelle Tirel: *Rodin Intime* (Paris, 1923), p. 7.

but moderate zeal in his school work, though this was chiefly due to short-sightedness; and he has often admitted that he loathed mathematics and understood nothing about them.

At fourteen he returned to Paris, and his taste for art having become accentuated, he entered a free drawing school (*La Petite École de Dessin*) at No. 5, Rue de l'École de Médecine. His father did not wish him to be an artist. "*C'est des fainéants et des propres à rien*," said the police inspector ("Artists are idlers and good-for-nothings"). But the atmosphere of the Latin quarter had cast its spell over the boy, and, for better or worse, he decided to study art.

And now began a period of very strenuous industry for young Auguste; as, in addition to the school hours, which were from eight in the morning till midday, he used to go twice weekly to Barye's lectures in the Jardin des Plantes, to the Louvre to study the antique, and to the Imperial Library to examine and copy the engravings after the works of the old masters.

The work at the drawing school, where he learnt the elements of drawing and modelling, consisted of copying red chalk drawings and bas-reliefs in the style of Louis XVI.; and it was here that he met Dalou and Legros, both of whom became distinguished artists and his life-long friends. At Barye's lectures he did not learn much. "He used to come to us tired and depressed," Rodin declared, "and all he would say was simply 'All right, that's very good.'"

In the cellars below the museum, however, with Barye's son and other young men, Rodin made a sort of sculptor's studio, and, fashioning for themselves rough pedestals out of trunks of trees, practised modelling. Barye may not have been a very conscientious teacher, but Rodin never forgot one lesson that he learnt from him, which was to fix his attention reverently upon Nature, and perseveringly to study her at first hand.

He also studied the anatomical models in the museum, and, as he was too poor to buy an anatomy of the horse, is said to have copied this piece by piece. To earn his bread at this time, moreover, he was obliged to work at an ornament maker's, where he prepared models for purposes of house decoration. At first he despised this work and regarded it as a rather shameful prostitution of his gifts, but in time he came to think differently of it and ultimately believed that as much beauty could lie in ornament as in the human figure.

This strenuous existence lasted until he was twenty-four years of age. But, meanwhile, many things had happened and much had been done to develop the artist and, above all, the sculptor in his being. He says of himself in this period that he found great pleasure in studying leaves of trees, trees themselves and architecture. He also met a number of people who influenced him, and, all the while, in his spare moments he worked at modelling from

life. Among the men to whom he said he owed most, was one, Constant Simon by name, who in these years taught him the principle of balance in a figure in movement. The world knows nothing about Constant Simon; he was an obscure and unsuccessful sculptor, but a born artist, and Rodin never forgot the lessons he learnt from him.

Before he had been at the drawing school quite three years, Rodin ventured to present himself for admission to the École des Beaux Arts, the national school of art, where training is free, and where the rewards are substantial and much coveted. The candidates for the painting and sculpture side of the school had to attend the examination hall for two hours a day for a week, and were expected to work from the living model. Three times Rodin failed to satisfy the examiners with the work he did in these circumstances; and, in the end, he gave it up as a bad job, convinced that he had not the knack of producing the kind of sculpture which his contemporaries regarded as pleasing.

This was his first encounter with academic and official standards of art in France, and there is no gainsaying that the outcome of it was a blow to him. Possibly the bitterness with which in after life he spoke of the pontiffs of the art world, was to be ascribed chiefly to these early disappointments.

We do not doubt now that the work he submitted at these three examinations was as good,

if not better, than that by which the successful candidates secured their admission. What is doubtful, however, is whether any one of us who to-day think those examiners foolish and mistaken would have done any better than they did. Nothing is more easy than to approve antiques and to rhapsodise over old masters. It simply amounts to endorsing indolently the traditional verdict of our civilisation. On the other hand, nothing is more difficult than correctly to value anything fresh and new. Indeed, in the present complete chaos of values, it is almost impossible to do so.

To deny that in these early works Rodin must have revealed something of his extreme originality of feeling and treatment, would be to make a claim almost fantastic. If, however, he did reveal himself so young, then the probability is that we ourselves, in the place of those examiners, would have rejected him just as they did.

At the age of twenty, Rodin lost his sister Clotilde, his senior by two years, and the loss was a very severe blow to him. So deeply did he feel it that he almost went out of his mind, and was only saved for the world by the care of a priest of the Holy Catholic Church. Incidentally, his cure by this priest led him very nearly to adopt the Church as a calling; but when it came to the point of choosing between life and holy orders, he decided in favour of the former.

There appears to be some doubt as to his age

when he first met Marie Rose Beuret and began to live with her. If their son Auguste was really born a year after his father and mother started life together, we must place their meeting in the year 1865. Frederick Lawton, however, in his *Life of Rodin*, says that the sculptor was twenty-three when "he took a wife."* This would hardly seem to tally with another account, which gives the date of Auguste's birth as 1866, "a year after Rodin and Rose Beuret began their joint existence."†

At any rate, we may place the meeting of Rodin and his life-long mate somewhere between 1863 and 1865, though Frederick Lawton is certainly wrong in implying that they were married at this time; for they did not actually marry until fifty years later.

It is true that all of us at Meudon used to address Rose Beuret as Madame Rodin, and when the prurient curiosity of certain lady visitors prompted them to question me privately concerning Rodin's relationship to the silent, handsome old lady who used to sit anxiously at the table, never daring to draw attention on herself when guests were present, I invariably replied that Rodin was legally married to her. It is only right to reward such gross indiscretion with false intelligence.

* Page 24.

† See Marcelle Tirel (*op. cit.*, p. 8). This book is a very valuable little monograph, full of the most penetrating observations.

In a book purporting to give, if not a complete, at least a true account of a great man's life, however, there is no point in calling the love union of two young Bohemians matrimony, or the female party to such a union wife; for it seems to me that these terms have such precise connotations that they are likely to lead to some misunderstanding.

Rose Beuret, who hailed from the district of Champagne, had found work in Paris as a needlewoman, and it was during her employment in this capacity at the business of a Madame Paul of the Gobelins quarter, that Rodin met her. He was working at the time upon the decorations of the Théâtre des Gobelins, and that is probably how they came across one another.

It was either shortly before or shortly after he had settled down with Rose Beuret, that he produced the famous bust of the "Man with the Broken Nose"—a piece of work classical in treatment, and most conscientious in the detail of its modelling and its fidelity to nature. It is the only piece of sculpture from his hands that has survived from the period of his earliest struggles (1855–1875)—the rest are either lost or unknown—and he sent a plaster cast of it to the Salon of 1864. It was, however, merely the occasion for another unhappy clash with officialdom and academic art, for it was rejected, and Rodin was once more apprised of his apparent inability to please the art orthodoxy of his age.

Twelve years later the same subject in marble was accepted and exhibited in the Salon, and in time to come was to win perhaps as large a share of celebrity as any work of modern sculpture; and it was probably this first small success in 1876, in the official home of French art, that ultimately led to the event which established Rodin's fame. But I am anticipating.

Towards the end of his twenty-fourth year, Rodin gave up his employment with the ornament maker and became the assistant of the then popular and famous sculptor Carrier-Belleuse. He was pleased with the change, because, as he said, "It took me away from an ornament maker to one who made figures."

For six years he worked with his new employer "without learning anything important from him," and all he did during this time was to develop and complete the sketches that Carrier-Belleuse handed to him. He could not, however, develop them in his own way; for if he had, they could not have borne his master's signature. He was therefore obliged not only to carry out another's inspiration, but also to some extent to imitate that other's style, and this arduous and thankless work lasted until the outbreak of the Franco-German War.

The war, as I have shown in another chapter, fortunately did not affect Rodin as disastrously as it did many another young artist; for, while it lasted, he only served in the National Guard, and when it was over, and he had experienced

the siege of Paris, he quickly left the city before the beginning of the Commune in order to flee to Brussels. He had not enjoyed his duties as a National Guard, and he was also very poor; but he left for Belgium with the highest hopes and the most ambitious schemes, leaving Rose Beuret and her child behind in Paris. Rose Beuret could not have received much help from him for months, for she appears to have kept herself and her child for some considerable time by making up soldiers' shirts at so many *sous* a dozen.

Carrier-Belleuse, who had left Paris on the outbreak of war, had gone to Brussels to undertake some work of decoration on the Bourse and the Palais des Académies, and when Rodin called upon him, he found his old employer quite ready to accept his services again.

Thus Rodin soon found work and became engaged upon sculptures for two of the most important public buildings in Brussels. With the Burgomaster Loos monument at Antwerp and a number of Caryatides in the Boulevard Anspach in Brussels, these buildings still bear the impress of his genius; but, as there appears to be some divergence of opinion between the authorities as to what Rodin actually did on each of them, and as I have never stayed in Belgium, I prefer not to make any definite statements about the matter. At all events, it is certain that the experience Rodin gained in doing this work was very valuable to him; for not only

were the sculptures on a very much larger scale than he had been used to heretofore, but most of them were also destined to be seen in the open air, a fact which necessitated certain instructive modifications in his technique.

Associated with him was a Belgian sculptor named Van Rasbourg, and when, after a slight difference with Rodin, Carrier-Belleuse returned to Paris, these two carried on together and finished the work which Rodin's employer had been commissioned to execute.

Rose Beuret ultimately joined Rodin in Brussels, and apparently they lived a very simple and happy life in a cottage at the extremity of Ixelles, in the Rue du Bourgomestre, No. 15. Rodin does not seem at this period to have sought the acquaintance of either wealthy or influential people, but, like Dickens, to have contented himself with the friendships he made among humble folk, his neighbours and his landlord's people. About the time that Rose Beuret joined him in Brussels, he was at work upon "The Age of Bronze," for which a Belgian soldier of some sapper regiment was posing, and he was then making a fair income. Indeed, so considerable were his earnings, that he was able to put some money aside and to realise a wish he had long cherished, which was to travel about Europe to study her more famous art collections. He began by visiting the galleries and museums of Belgium.

In 1875 he was able to go as far as Italy, where

he stayed a few weeks, and there he made a thorough study of the art of the Renaissance artists and particularly of Michael Angelo. It is said by many that his work resembles Michael Angelo's, and that he himself was struck by this likeness. I, however, incline to the opinion of Monsieur Camille Mauclair, that such comparisons are dangerous, the more so when the resemblance, as in this case, is so remote. True, Rodin was a Gothic, and considered Michael Angelo as a Gothic also; but, apart from one or two of his pieces—such, for instance, as " The Age of Bronze "—his original and personal style distinguishes him so sharply from the great Renaissance sculptor, that the comparison appears far-fetched and hasty.

On his return to Brussels, Rodin was convinced that, if he was to find himself and produce important work, he must seek his inspiration in Nature herself and not in any predecessor, ancient or modern; and, coming to the conclusion that one of the secrets of the Renaissance artists' power was the natural and unconstrained positions which they allowed their models to take, he forthwith concentrated his attention upon the natural form alone, and, with the clay under his fingers, seized only the spontaneous attitudes assumed by his sitters.

It was thus that in the year 1876, after over eighteen months' work upon it, he produced the famous figure " The Age of Bronze," the statue that was to make his name, and it was exhibited

in January, 1877, at the Cercle Artistique in Brussels.

From its mixed reception Rodin might have inferred the trials and anxieties that it was to bring him in Paris: but he believed in the work; he knew he had put his best into it, and in the spring of 1877, when he was thirty-six years of age, he returned with Rose Beuret and their son and this statue to Paris.

Having submitted a plaster cast of his sculpture to the Salon of 1877, he was gratified to learn that it was accepted. And then occurred an event which was calculated completely to make or mar him.

The Salon Committee were puzzled by the extreme realism of the treatment and the perfection of the modelling and the proportions of "The Age of Bronze," and one or two members of the body expressed the suspicion that the statue had been made from casts taken direct from life. This charge had indeed already been suggested in a Belgian paper—*L'Étoile Belge*—a few months previously, and Rodin had replied to it by an indignant letter of refutation; but nobody has ever yet been able to ascertain whether any member of that Salon Committee had seen or heard anything of the Belgian version of the charge. At any rate, the statue was badly placed and criticised adversely, and the suspicion felt by the Salon Committee, which amounted to a very serious accusation against the sculptor, quickly spread abroad and reached Rodin's ears.

Unfortunately, the crime of taking casts direct from life was not unknown even among prominent sculptors in those days; and, moreover, Rodin had no friends and very little money. The small section of the world that knew him thought of him only as an assistant of Carrier-Belleuse, and, had not the charge wounded Rodin into fury, nobody would ever have troubled to investigate it.

The charge was so absolutely groundless, and revealed so much ignorance on the part of those who made it—for quite irrespective of the obvious technical evidences of casts from life which the Committee should have known,* there is hardly a feature of " The Age of Bronze " that does not refute the accusation at sight—that at first Rodin could hardly believe that it had been meant seriously. He soon discovered, however, that the jury had been perfectly serious, and straightway set to work, despite the small means at his disposal, to silence the calumny. He therefore lodged a formal protest in the right quarter, and Edmond Turquet, the Under Secretary of State for Fine Arts, who was attracted by " The Age of Bronze " and was personally convinced of its genuineness, thereupon ordered an enquiry to be held. But despite the individual loyalty of the Committee of Investigation, the prestige of those who had first harboured the suspicion was so overwhelming

* These have since been pointed out by such writers and critics as Léon Maillard and Gustave Geoffroy.

that, ultimately, the verdict it gave was only an uncompromising statement to the effect that it was unconvinced of the falseness of the statue.

Rodin made a further appeal to the Minister, and, on the advice of a fellow-sculptor, had various casts taken from life and photographed, in order that they might be compared with the modelling of his figure. These photographs were duly sent to the jury of the Salon, but, according to Camille Mauclair, the parcel containing them was never opened, and the officials abided by their accusation.*

At last, even his model, the Belgian soldier, offered to come to Paris to give evidence in his favour. But this was judged unnecessary, and it was not until a body of fellow-artists, with singularly noble impartiality, appealed in a letter to the Minister, that Rodin's character was vindicated.

This exemplary act of intervention happened as follows: In order to earn some money for his small household, Rodin had undertaken a piece of work—a group of children—for the sculptor Boucher, and it was while watching him execute this group in only a few hours that Boucher became convinced that a man capable of such a feat must also have been capable of the perfect modelling of "The Age of Bronze." Boucher lost no time in telling his friends of what he had seen, and very soon Chapuis, Thomas,

* *Auguste Rodin : The Man, his Ideas and his Works* (Duckworth, 1905), chapter i.

Delaplanche, Chaplin, Paul Dubois and Carrier-Belleuse, impressed by Boucher's story, took sides with him, and Rodin's cause was won.

Turquet, the Minister, delighted at the issue, immediately awarded Rodin a medal of the third class, purchased the statue for the State, and, to crown all, gave Rodin a further commission. But all these negotiations and conferences had taken time, and the painful incident proved an unconscionably long-drawn-out strain to the struggling sculptor.

This was Rodin's third unfortunate experience at the hands of the official leaders of art in France, and whenever he spoke about it, he could ill conceal his hatred of both the Institute and the School which is its nursery (l'École et l'Institut). Nevertheless, it had proved the occasion for an act of uncommon generosity on the part of those who ultimately defended his honour; for, seeing that these men were his rivals in the art world, their magnanimity speaks highly for the solidarity of French artists of that day.

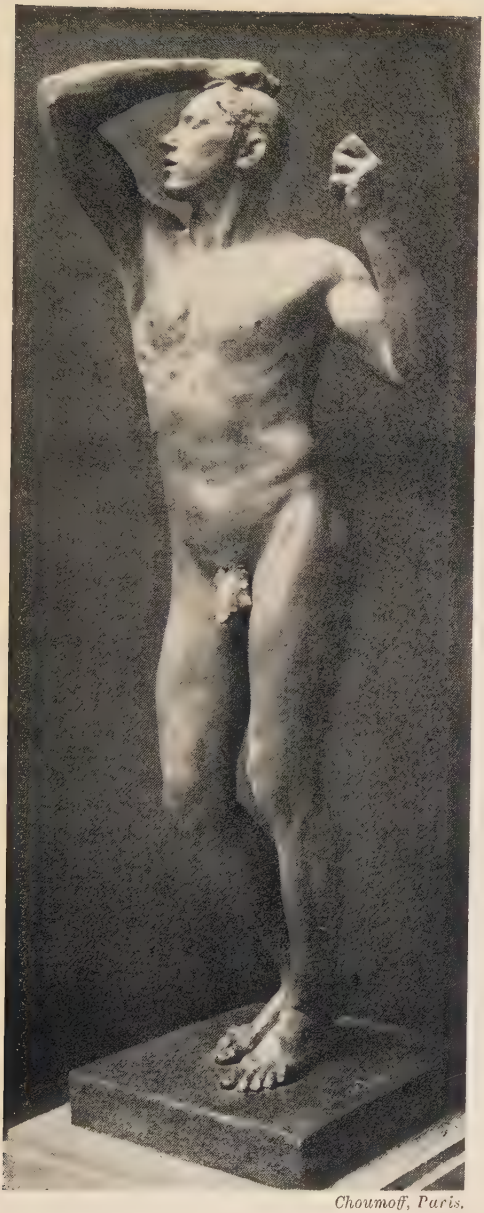
Certain substantial advantages, however, undoubtedly accrued to Rodin from the terrible ordeal. Before sending "The Age of Bronze" to the Salon, he had only a few uninfluential friends and no fame with the public. But after his vindication, he found himself not only surrounded by friends, many of whom remained by his side to the end, but also discovered that he had won a reputation among the general

public which was the dawn of his ultimate triumph.

Meanwhile, in 1877, Rodin had visited the great cathedrals of France, and there is no doubt, as I shall show in the sequel, that the study of their sculptures made a deep impression upon his mind and upon his attitude to his art. The "John the Baptist," which he exhibited in the Salon of 1880, already showed this influence, and with it there was made an end of the smooth, elegant and conventional sculpture of the period.

Executed in a small studio in the Rue des Fourneaux—a place of which he was to speak with special tenderness in later years—this statue created something of a sensation, and, like "The Age of Bronze," was purchased by the State, and earned him a medal of the third class. But there were many dissentient voices: many who thought the work incongruous, who objected to the figure's poise and to the action of the legs, and who thought it ridiculous to represent an itinerant preacher stark naked. But knowledgeable people were beginning to feel that in Rodin the art of sculpture, which had reached a very low ebb about this time, had found a vigorous and original champion, and some already began to foretell his great future.

It was about this time that he began his life work, "The Gates of Hell." Truth to tell, the inspiration for this colossal undertaking had come in response to the further commission



Choumoff, Paris.

AGE OF BRONZE.

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which, as mentioned above, Rodin had received from Turquet at the time his " Age of Bronze " had been purchased by the State; and his reasons for conceiving the work at first as a confusion of small figures are characteristic. It must be remembered that the order was for a doorway for the Palais des Arts Décoratifs.

" Having been suspected of casting from life," he declared, " I shall now execute this order for the Palais des Arts Décoratifs by making a number of bas-reliefs on a small scale, so that no one can say I have cheated. And I will take my material from Dante."

Thus began that imposing series of figures and groups of figures which were to occupy him to the very end of his life—for the doorway was never, to my knowledge, completed. But during the course of its execution he altered his scheme over and over again, and certainly did not abide by his original plan of making only bas-reliefs on a small scale.

In 1879 Carrier-Belleuse, who had been appointed Art Director of the Sèvres Porcelain Works, engaged Rodin to decorate some vases, and one of these, purchased by the State, is preserved in the Sèvres Museum. His connection with Sèvres lasted about three years, but while engaged there he continued his private work, and executed many fine sculptures. The most important of these produced at this time are his " Genius of War " (1880) and his " Adam" and " Eve " (1881). The first was the outcome

of his having taken part in a competition to commemorate national defence, but the sketch which he submitted was not even included by the jury amongst the first thirty chosen for consideration.

The "Adam," according to Mauclair, he appears to have destroyed,* as it did not please him, while the "Eve" was the well-known figure of a woman bowing her head as if in shame, which is the best among his statues. As I mention later on, it is the figure on which he happened to be engaged when his model was rudely snatched from him by a lover; but its great beauty causes the untrained spectator to wonder whether, if Rodin had retained her longer, he could possibly have improved her statue.

In 1881 Rodin paid his first visit to England, and while there, at the house of his friend Professor Legros, he met Henley and Stevenson, both of whom were to become his friends. In 1882 he produced the first sketch of the "Ugolino" and a bust of "Legros," and in 1883 a "Statue of General Lynch" and "Bellona." For the last of these Madame Rodin was his model, and when I was at Meudon, in spite of her great age, her features were still recognisable in this bust. She must have been a very handsome woman, for even in old age she was pleasant to look upon, although her features were large and not of the soft, smooth kind usually associated with good looks in a woman.

* *Op. cit.*, chapter ii.

Between 1884 and 1886 Rodin produced a number of important works, the most memorable of which are the busts of "Jean Paul Laurens," "Victor Hugo," "Henley," "Antonin Proust," and "Carrier-Belleuse," and the "Statue of President Vicunha"; while in 1886 he designed the monument of "Victor Hugo" which had been ordered by the State in 1883.

The bust of "Victor Hugo," which, in my opinion, is the most remarkable of his portraits, was executed under the greatest difficulties. Victor Hugo, who thought that he had been quite satisfactorily represented by the sculptor David d'Angers, refused to give Rodin sittings, and simply told him that he must do his best to produce the bust by coming when he liked to observe him while he ate and entertained his friends. Thus Rodin had to collect notes under the most trying circumstances, drawing on odd pieces of paper as he sat at the poet's table, and frequently having to leave the company to rush out to the clay model which he always kept in a room close at hand so that he might register a vivid and useful impression.

Rodin lost his father in 1883, and the old man, who had been living with him, was nursed until the end most devotedly by Rose Beuret. Two years later Rodin's son Auguste was called up for military service, and, when he went to join his regiment, it appears that Rodin implored him to try at least to earn some stripes as he "was not much good for anything else."

In 1884 Rodin had received the order from the town of Calais for his next important work, "The Burghers of Calais." But while occupied on this group he produced many other notable sculptures, among which the most important were the monument to "Bastien Lepage," the "Danaïdes" (marble), "Thought," a bust of "Octave Mirbeau," a woman's torso, the "Dream," and "The Old Helmetmaker's Wife." In 1889, as the result of the secession of a powerful group of artists from the Société des Artistes Français, a rival Salon was formed under the control of a new body calling itself the Société Nationale des Beaux Arts, and Rodin, who was one of the seceders, became a prominent member of the new corporation. The result was that in 1890 a second Salon opened its doors to the public, and the Society under whose auspices this was done has remained in existence ever since. In 1893 Rodin, who was elected President of the section of sculpture, thus became its Vice-President.

Meanwhile he had been making many friends both in France and England, and had begun to visit people in administrative and Government circles in Paris. His portrait busts were adding to his fame, and during the next few years he had as sitters some of the most distinguished people of the day. "Roger Marx," "Puvis de Chavannes" and "Henri Rochefort" are among the best of his smaller sculptures dating from this period; while among the more important

pieces the most notable are "The Young Mother," "Nymphs," "Pain" and the monument to "Claude Lorrain." An exhibition he had held in the Georges Petit gallery, together with his friend Claude Monet, in 1888 created an immense sensation and greatly enhanced his reputation; and it was in the course of this year that he became a Chevalier of the Legion of Honour.

The friends Rodin had made among the writers and journalists of his day had now given him a body of supporters who were at hand to defend him at the slightest sign of ignorant and abusive hostility, and one has only to read the incisive and powerful essays of such men as Camille Mauclair, Gustave Geoffroy, Octave Mirbeau and Roger Marx to understand how formidable this band of defenders were.

The storm that arose over the monument to "Claude Lorrain" gives an example of the energy with which they fought Rodin's battles for him.

A committee had been formed at Nancy, the capital of Lorraine, Claude Gelée's native province, for the purpose of collecting the necessary funds for the erection of a commemorative statue of the famous painter; and a sub-committee which sat in Paris was entrusted with the task of selecting a sculptor. A competition was opened, and twelve sculptors, one of whom was Rodin, sent in sketches. By a majority of one the committee selected Rodin, and Roger

Marx, who had been one of the judges, was naturally delighted.

When, however, the monument was erected, the good people of Nancy would have nothing of it, and, after the unveiling ceremony, began to manifest their marked disapproval. "*Cette statue, nous la trouvons mauvaise,*" said one of the local authorities, "*et pourtant nous ne sommes pas des bêtes.*"* And most people of influence in the neighbourhood combined in an endeavour to have the statue removed.

Rodin had depicted "Claude Lorrain" eagerly scrutinising the horizon as if gathering the necessary strength of inspiration to interpret the mystery and light of the landscape. The painter stands on a pedestal which is richly decorated with a group consisting of Apollo and his two-horse chariot, with the horses only half disengaged from the block of stone.

The people of Nancy thought that the interest of the carvings on the pedestal overpowered the statue of the painter. They, moreover, found fault with the pose of the statue itself and thought the body lamentable. The agitation to have it removed gained in strength, despite the fact that the President of the Republic had attended the unveiling ceremony, and for a while it looked as if Rodin might have to accommodate the statue in his own studio.

At this juncture, however, two natives of the

* We are not a pack of fools, and yet we think this statue a bad one.

locality, Roger Marx and Émile Gallé, came to the rescue of the monument, and with great ability and insight began to interpret the meaning of Rodin's production to their countrymen. It is impossible to repeat here the skilful arguments advanced by these two champions in defence of the monument; but it was certainly owing to their tireless efforts that it was allowed to retain its position in the Pépinière Park, where it has gradually conquered local opinion and is now one of the proudest possessions of the town of Nancy.

This happened in 1892, and the event was quickly followed by the sensation created with the "Burghers of Calais."

The "Burghers of Calais," which was the name ultimately given to the famous group, was, as I have explained in another chapter, not precisely the object of the commission originally given to the sculptor by the Town Council of Calais. Calais had asked for a commemorative statue of Eustache de St. Pierre; but in working out the idea, Rodin had developed it into a group of six burghers, instead of only their leader. He therefore proposed to the committee to execute the group for the same sum (15,000 francs, or £600) as he was to get for the single figure, and the committee having accepted the proposal, he proceeded to work out his idea.

His friends could not conceive why he had been so foolish as to undertake so expensive an extension of the committee's original order at

the price they had offered for one figure; but Rodin was not the sort of man to allow money to weigh with him when once he had become enthusiastically engaged in an artistic production, and by the month of July, 1886, his rough model in reduced size was examined by the committee. It was approved, and the work went steadily forward. In 1889 the complete group was exhibited at the International Exhibition and provoked an enormous amount of controversy and comment. The extreme unconventionality, both of the grouping and of the attitudes of the figures, their harrowing misery so dramatically and simply portrayed, took Paris by storm. Never had anything like it been seen in sculpture.

"*Les chefs nuds, les pieds déchaux, la hart au col, les clefs de la ville et du chastel entre les mains,*"* says the chronicler Froissart, concerning the group of Calais citizens who went to Edward III. to save their city. And Rodin, both in his able grouping and his treatment of each individual figure, had almost exceeded the possible in moving realism.

Many raised their voices against the sculpture, however, and were vehement in their criticism of its sordidness. "It is not heroic enough," said some; others complained that the attitudes of the figures were too naive, or that they had

* "With their heads bared, naked feet, halters about their necks and bearing the keys of the town and castle in their hands."

been designed to be seen only at one angle. These criticisms, however, were drowned in the great flood of praise that began to swell around the statue. Nevertheless, certain people in Calais, taking their cue from the hostile critics of Paris, began an agitation against the "Burghers" and strove to convince the Town Council of the unworthiness of Rodin's work. And for a while the fund stood at a standstill.

In 1893 efforts were made to revive the enthusiasm of subscribers, but these efforts proving inadequate, the Minister of the Interior was obliged to intervene; and at last when in 1895 the necessary sum was provided the monument was erected.

Even in the hour of his triumph, however, Rodin had to suffer certain disappointments; for, not only was he unable to persuade the authorities of Calais to place the monument where it belonged, in the ancient market-place of the city; but he also failed to induce them to accept his views regarding the pedestal, which, he said, should either be of considerable height or eliminated altogether, so that the figures might stand almost on a level with the ground. In the end, the group was placed on a low pedestal and in the Place de la Poste.

Meanwhile Rodin had been adding a number of productions to the already imposing list of his sculptures. The year 1893 saw the "Death of Adonis," the medallion of "César Franck," "Galatea," the bust of "Madame Severine,"

"Resurrection" and "Achilles as a Child." The year 1894 brought "Eternal Spring," "Hope," "Orpheus and Eurydice" and "Christ and Mary Magdalene." And in 1895, in addition to "Illusion," there appeared "Icarus's Daughter," a medallion of "Octave Mirbeau," "Adonis and Venus" and "The Crouching Man."

According to Camille Mauclair, all Rodin's symbolic figures were inspired by Dante, while his smaller groups recalled "Les Fleurs dù Mal," by Baudelaire, whom the sculptor very much admired. There is certainly a remarkable disparity between the two sets of works, a disparity which is at once emotional and conceptual. They seem almost to be the work of different sculptors; and at Meudon I noticed that women were inclined to prefer the latter, while Rodin's male critics and admirers favoured the former.

The big figures of the "Gates of Hell" all come under the head of the first group, and among them "Le Penseur" and "Le Baiser" now began to occupy Rodin's mind, although they were not completed until years afterwards. "Le Penseur" was originally conceived as a representation of Dante, and was supposed to crown the gate, while "The Kiss" was meant to illustrate the amours of Paolo and Francesca.

Meanwhile Rodin had been working hard at his monument of "Victor Hugo," but it was not to meet with favour, for the Commissioner of Public Works, to whom the model was submitted,

had a sketch of the group placed on the site chosen for the monument, and after this experiment decided that it was unsuitable and rejected it. That is why to-day it stands with its Muses removed in the garden of the Palais Royal instead of in the Square Victor Hugo.

I confess I was never much attracted to this monument. Rightly or wrongly, I feel it is not one of Rodin's most genial conceptions, and, owing to mental associations which had been formed in my early youth—for I had been introduced to Hugo's works and his personality as a child—I could not help agreeing with the American ladies who thought it a pity that Rodin had stripped the poor old poet before depicting him. The head and shoulders are probably the best part of the statue, and I feel that the Commissioner of Public Works for once did not err so very much in rejecting the monument.

In 1890 Rodin had given up his Paris flat to live in Bellevue, near Sèvres, which was within easy access of his studio in the Rue de l'Université, and he never resided in Paris again. The house in which I found him in 1906, known as the Villa des Brillants, on the hill of Meudon, was taken four years later, and was the other side of the valley separating Bellevue from Meudon Val Fleury. The district is a quiet one, and the surrounding scenery inspiring, while the proximity of the Meudon woods affords opportunities for long solitary rambles.

It was after his removal to Bellevue that the

history of the "Balzac" statue began, and from 1891, when, through the influence of Zola, Rodin was selected by the Committee of the Société des Gens de Lettres to execute the work, until the day of Rodin's death, the controversy that raged around this statue may be said never to have ceased.

Chapu had originally been chosen by the Committee in 1888 to execute the statue, and had indeed produced a rough model of it. But he died before he could complete it, and Rodin, who applied to the Société des Gens de Lettres to be allowed to succeed him, offered to produce a statue in bronze about three metres high with pedestal to match in the space of eighteen months for the sum remaining over from the subscription (about 30,000 francs, or £1,200).

As three years had been wasted, the Society was naturally anxious to lose no more time, and Rodin was urged to push on his work as quickly as possible. He proceeded with all possible speed, but precise information about Balzac's appearance was difficult to collect, and the documents were few and not always satisfactory.

By the end of 1892, when the statue had not yet been delivered, there was some unpleasant correspondence between Rodin and the Committee, and strange to say, Zola appears to have been on the side of those who began to be hostile and to press Rodin for the fulfilment of his contract.

1893 and 1894 went by, and still there was no

sign of the completed statue, and, after a further exchange of letters, a fresh agreement was drawn up in which no time limit whatsoever was imposed upon the sculptor.

From 1894 to the beginning of 1898 the question of the "Balzac" statue almost became a joke with the journalists and populace of Paris, and there were many who began to doubt whether Rodin was in earnest about his undertaking to produce the work. Then, one day in the spring of 1898, Rodin at last packed up a plaster cast of his finished work, and it went to the Champ de Mars to be exhibited, together with a piece of sculpture very different in style—"The Kiss," in marble.

The contrast between the two, of which Rodin himself was fully aware, and which only increased his approval of the "Balzac," was, from the public standpoint, unfortunate. The beautiful marble group, so well known to the art world, carefully finished and representing a moment so chastely passionate in human life, could hardly fail to eclipse the rugged plaster of "Balzac" in the public mind, and in the Salon of 1898 this contrast probably did much to foment the fury that was raised by the more genial sculpture.

Needless to say, the "Balzac" was received with a howl of indignation both by the ordinary public, the critics and a number of prominent artists; and the Société des Gens de Lettres, allowing themselves to be influenced by the popular indignation, but probably also genuinely

shocked themselves by Rodin's creation, passed a hurried resolution in which they refused to recognise Rodin's "rough model" as a statue of Balzac, and the sculptor was informed that they would neither accept the work nor pay for it.

With regard to the critics and artists who took up this hostile attitude, it is interesting to note that the very same people who, twenty years previously, had suspected "The Age of Bronze" of having been cast from life, because its modelling was so perfect, now declared that Rodin knew nothing of his craft; and there were not a few who believed that he had with his statue intended to play a practical joke both on the Société des Gens de Lettres and also upon the public.

"Rodin has given us a snow man (*un bonhomme de neige*) instead of a Balzac," said the crowd, and the whole of Paris, except possibly the subscribers to the statue, roared with laughter.

We, however, who look back upon these events with a certain amount of supercilious wonder, and who, like one or two Rodin biographers, are prone to see a deplorable demonstration of stupidity in this public outburst, should remember not only that the people of Paris are, on the whole, highly educated in taste and artistic criticism, but also that the "Balzac" statue was an extremely difficult piece of work to understand, particularly in the plaster cast.

Accustomed as we are now to the strange and the unprecedented in art, and cautious as we

may have become through many a humiliating lesson, it is nevertheless questionable whether we ourselves should not feel a little staggered if we were now confronted with the "Balzac" for the first time.

Its colossal latent energy, its overwhelming simplicity, the way it cleaves the air like a living thing springing naturally from the soil—these are qualities which, to say the least, we are not accustomed to with our tradition of smooth, tame, *papier-maché* street statuary. And we should therefore look a little more tolerantly upon those dear Parisians who, though more accustomed than we are to live art, were yet not prepared for this prodigy of dynamic plastic representation.

A long tradition of gingerbread modelling had destroyed their standards. But this was the fault of the artists who had preceded Rodin and not of the public themselves.

Rodin's bitter disappointment and the abuse which was flung at his work from all quarters naturally did not fail to arouse the sympathy of a large number of his contemporaries, and, although his first impulse was to fight the matter out with the Société des Gens de Lettres, the support and friendly messages he began to receive from all sides ultimately assuaged his grief, and gave him time to think more calmly about the situation.

There were some who even offered to buy the statue outright, while a committee consisting of

friendly sculptors and other artists was formed with the object of purchasing the statue for some site in Paris.

But in the end the "Balzac" found its way back to Rodin's studio, where it was to remain until his death. Another artist, Falguière, was commissioned by the Société des Gens de Lettres to execute the work, and a year later his production, which was accepted, was exhibited at the Salon.

Thus ended the *affaire Balzac*, the most sensational in the artist's life. But when it was over, Rodin's struggle had also ended, for his reputation was now world-wide, and he began to receive commissions from every quarter of the globe.

Meanwhile he had produced many a famous sculpture, and the time was drawing nigh when the millions who were to attend the Universal Exhibition of 1900 were to be in a position to become acquainted with his work.

In 1896 were produced "The Inner Voice" and the "Goddess of Anger" (both for the "Victor Hugo" monument), the "Minerva" and "Bathing Women"; in 1897 the monument to "President Sarmiento"; in 1898 two busts of women, the monument to "Work," the "Blessings" (marble) and the "Dawn," "Twilight" (group), "Falguière" (bust), the "Earth and the Moon"; and in 1899 "Psyche bearing her Lamp," "Mirage" and the "Man and his Thought."

It was in 1900 that I first made the acquaintance of Rodin's works on a large scale. I happened to be in Paris for the Universal Exhibition, and I was among those who paid their franc to be admitted into the special pavilion on the Place de l'Alma in which he had collected almost everything of importance that he had done up to that time. Like many others, I was struck by the fact that, in an Exhibition in which each big nation was represented only by a comparatively small house of its own (apart from the particular commercial, industrial and artistic exhibits distributed over the various sections), a special place and shelter should have been provided for the works of one sculptor whom, though known to me at the time, I did not believe to be important or popular enough to be worthy of this official recognition. I little knew the true history of that special pavilion, and apparently the *Encyclopædia Britannica* has to this day remained in the same state of ignorance as I was in then.

In the eleventh edition of the *Encyclopædia* (article, "Rodin") we read the following: "In 1900 the city of Paris, to do honour to Rodin, erected at its own expense a building close to one of the entrances of the Great Exhibition in which almost all Rodin's works were to be seen."

This is what I thought too; but apparently I was wrong.

The idea was Rodin's own. He considered

that he was sufficiently heterodox, and yet sufficiently anxious to be judged by a wide public, to make a personal appeal with his work to the visitors to the Exhibition of 1900; and he therefore set to work to organise a scheme by which this could be accomplished. He found that the necessary building and other expenses would amount to about 80,000 francs (£3,000), and he hoped that, in view of the large crowds that were expected, the outlay might be covered by the gate money. He could not, however, bear the risk alone, and it was then that three Paris bankers, Messrs. Kahn, Peytel and Dorizon, offered to lend him 20,000 francs each, if he could supply the balance.

When it was a matter of securing a site, some hostility was shown on the Paris Municipal Council, probably fomented by Rodin's many enemies and envious rivals. But ultimately his cause prevailed, and the bright little pavilion which all those who were at the 1900 Exhibition must certainly remember, standing at one corner of the Place de l'Alma, was the result of the scheme.

A special catalogue was prepared, containing a few remarks about Rodin by prominent artists, and the doors were at last thrown open to the public. I remember particularly the "Hand of God," the "Aged Wife of the Helmet-maker" (which I confess shocked me) and the "Balzac." Apparently the undertaking was a commercial success, and the outlay was covered

by the gate money; but the pavilion did not long survive the close of the Exhibition, although it was resuscitated at Meudon Val Fleury, where it served the purpose of a large studio.

There is no doubt that this individual contribution to the Universal Exhibition of 1900 did Rodin an immense amount of good, and, although French, English and German expert criticism continued to be a little unfriendly, the general public had been won over.

The years 1902 to 1904 saw the production of a few important monuments and many excellent busts. The "Shadows," the "Child of the Age," the "Prodigal Son," the "Young Girl and the Two Genii" (marble group), the "Hand of God" (marble), the "Morning Star," the "Sculptor and his Muse," the "Spirit of the Spring," and the busts of the "Rt. Hon. George Wyndham," "M. Eugène Guillaume" and "M. Destournelle de Constant" all date from this period.

Rodin had begun to be known in England when he paid his first visit to this country in 1881, and his reputation grew steadily until in 1902, to celebrate the presentation of his "St. John" to the South Kensington Museum,* he came over to a banquet at the Café Royal presided over by Mr. Wyndham, then Chief Secretary for Ireland. Rodin was given an enthusiastic ovation, and the art students of the South Kensington and Slade Schools un-

* This was effected by means of a public subscription.

harnessed the horses of his carriage, and themselves drew it for some distance through the streets. A similar welcome was given him when, in the ensuing May, he returned to England for the special benefit of English art students, and on this occasion the young people themselves gave the banquet and made Mr. Alfred Gilbert, R.A., their chairman.

This was hardly over when, owing to the death of Whistler, their President, the International Society of Painters, Sculptors and Gravers decided to invite Rodin to take the American artist's place; and my father, Albert Ludovici and John Lavery went to Paris together to lay the suggestion before Rodin, who at once agreed to accept the nomination.

Thus in January, 1904, Rodin came to London for the third time in three years, and after attending the International Society's opening ceremony was banqueted at the Café Royal.

I attended the banquet with my father, and in after years, when I met Rodin and learnt to appreciate his extraordinary gift of expression and the lucidity of his thought, I could not help wondering why, on that occasion, he sat so silently throughout the speeches. I remember he was asked to reply to the many kind things that were said about him, but all he did was to rise from his chair and bow three times in succession.

It was my first sight of the great man, and I recollect how disappointed I was to find that his

immense and thick beard made it impossible for me to judge his physiognomy. In men the chin is so important as an index to character that I deplored the concealment and secrecy that his beard afforded him concerning a very self-revelatory feature.

That year six specimens of Rodin's work were shown in the New Gallery—"The Dream," the torso of "St. John," the "Vanquished Mother Country," "Bellona," a small replica of the "Thinker" and a large plaster of the same. All but the last were bronzes.

Meanwhile, ever since 1900, foreign interest in Rodin's work had greatly increased, and he began to receive invitations from Glasgow, Turin, Prague, Berlin, Venice, Düsseldorf and New York, to be represented at their exhibitions, where they always gave him the place of honour. In 1903 he had received from the French Government the rank of Commander in the Legion of Honour, having already been promoted to an Officer of the same order a few years previously; and special numbers of art journals began to be devoted entirely to his work.

The year 1904 saw the exhibition of his "Thinker" at the Salon, and very soon after its appearance a fund was raised by public subscription to purchase the work for the State and to erect it on some site to be selected in Paris. The sum raised was 15,000 francs, or £600, and the site chosen was just in front of the Panthéon, France's mausoleum to her great

dead. The statue was not erected until April, 1906, and then, if I am not mistaken, it was represented not by the bronze for which the subscription had been raised, for that was not ready, but by a plaster cast painted to look like bronze. And I believe it was during my stay with Rodin that one morning we heard that an enemy or a hater of his work had smashed this temporary plaster substitute to pieces with a hammer.

It is a massive, powerful statue. The big upper limbs hang heavily from the shoulders as if they really were of flesh and bone, and the whole effect is one of prodigious though restrained vitality. Rodin has been accused of having given us a brute instead of a thinker in this statue, and the *Dictionnaire Larousse*, in its short notice of the sculpture, speaks of a "*Titan plébéien*," who is "*plus semblable à un Ugolin dévorant son poing, ou un lutteur au repos qu'à un intellectuel dans son rêve.*"* But in thus depicting Thought Rodin probably showed the extreme sanity and healthiness of his outlook; for it is not unlikely that even at the present moment the world is paying very dearly indeed for the "thought" of its "intellectuals"—those, that is to say, who, according to the view of Western civilised humanity, must inevitably be associated with a certain degree of morbid physical frailty.

* A plebeian Titan, more like a Ugolino gnawing his fist, or a wrestler in repose, than an intellectual lost in meditation.

Among the most important of Rodin's next creations were the marble group of "Paolo Malatesta and Francesca da Rimini," the bust of "Miss E. F." (marble) and of "Madame de J." (marble), the monument to "Rollinat" (stone bas-relief) and "Brother and Sister" (marble) in 1905; and the busts of "Lord Howard de Walden," "Berthelot," and "Bernard Shaw," and the marble of "Hesiod and the Pleiades" in 1906.

When I reached the Villa des Brillants in June, 1906, these last-named works were just completed, but I found Rodin engaged chiefly on his monument to "Victor Hugo," the ultimate destiny of which I have already described, and a number of further busts. Truth to tell, except for his excursions to Marseilles and elsewhere in France, the greater part of his time while I was with him was occupied by busts of wealthy or well-known people from all over the civilised world, who wished to have their portraits made by a man who was now a universal celebrity; and letters came by almost every post asking for terms and begging for sittings.

Rodin was now, however, an old man. Though he was still wonderfully robust and healthy, we must not forget that he was sixty-six years of age, and his life had been a hard and industrious one. He was beginning to feel the strain of constantly being visited or interviewed by the journalists and lion-hunters of five continents, and would often sigh in private for the seclusion

and freedom of his poorer but more peaceful days in the studio of the Rue des Fourneaux.

Nevertheless, his powers as a sculptor, though perhaps more limited as regards output, had at this stage in his career by no means declined, and the wonderful results that I used to see him obtain from the clay after only one sitting for a portrait bust always astonished me.

Throughout the time I was with him I cannot recall that he ever suffered from anything more serious than a slight cold or that he ever had to remain idle for one day from illness; and there can be no doubt that the extreme sobriety and simplicity of his life at this period were responsible for his health and vigour. Rose Beuret, at the time I joined them, also appeared to be very robust and active, and, as they had only one house servant, must have had plenty to do.

I believe Marcelle Tirel took my place as Rodin's secretary in 1907, but, at all events, while I was with Rodin, his business and financial transactions were alone sufficiently important to occupy an accountant the whole of every morning of the week, and a young man used to come daily from Paris to keep his books in order. Whether this was found necessary after I left I do not know, but it is not unlikely, as, in spite of his age, Rodin's actual output, except of original work, was not declining. In this respect it should be remembered by those who are unacquainted with the life behind the scenes of a sculptor's studio, that sculpture, unlike paint-

ing, allows of such extraordinary opportunities for duplication, production on different scales and in different materials (bronze, stone, marble, plaster, terra-cotta and silver), and piecemeal repetition of the same statue (for instance, the head only of the "Balzac" statue, or of the "Victor Hugo" or "Bastien Lepage" monuments), that a sculptor who has made his name can, by employing a sufficient number of workmen and bronze founders, multiply his output almost indefinitely.

Rodin had a large technical personnel when I joined him, some of whom worked at Meudon and others in Paris; and, seeing that he could not carve from the marble and stone himself, and only gave the finishing touches to the work his assistants produced, his actual sales at the time I joined him were probably greater than they had ever been, although he himself was on the whole less occupied.

During the ensuing years but little was added to his already long list of works. The busts of "G. Mahler" and "Madame Hanako" date from 1909; the "Lys brisé," the bust of the "Duc de Rohan," and a woman's torso date from 1910; and the bust of "M. Clemenceau" from 1911.

In 1908 King Edward VII paid Rodin the honour of visiting him at Meudon, where the contents of the museum studio were carefully inspected by His Majesty; and, in the following year, as a tribute to the great sculptor's genius,

a special gallery containing only works by his hand was opened in the Metropolitan Museum of New York. Thus the closing years of Rodin's life were crowned with glory, and the recognition for which he had so long struggled came to him in a manner almost overwhelming. Surrounded by friends, and with orders for replicas of his sculptures reaching him from every quarter of the globe—even in the last year of his life, when he had ceased to create anything new, these orders are said to have represented £8,000—his industry as a sculptor gradually declined, and he began to turn his attention to literary work. Aphorisms on art and descriptions of the great French cathedrals, of which he was always such a sincere admirer, began to be published under his name, and people who enjoyed his friendship began carefully to record his sayings and to collect the crumbs that fell from his table.

Meanwhile, having first leased a portion of the Hôtel Biron, a beautiful old mansion in Paris, he ultimately occupied the whole of it, and after he had moved a number of his antiques and original productions there, it became his Paris studio.

A few more portrait busts and a little desultory work on earlier groups and schemes for monuments brought his sculptor's career to a close, and the war, which, as it seems, led him to call his son Auguste and his wife to Meudon to live, caused him to think of putting his domestic and

artistic affairs in order and to prepare for the end.

He began by writing his will, in which he left all his antiques and original productions to the State, and the formal act of handing over was effected on September 13, 1916, in the presence of the representatives of the Government. From that time onward, despite the fact that Rodin was to live another year, the rights of reproduction of his works were, I believe, in the hands of the Government. But Rodin knew that the most precious of his worldly possessions were in safe keeping, and he was content.

It was Rodin's wish that all his antiques and original works should be collected in the Hôtel Biron, which was to be made a Rodin Museum; and ultimately a law was passed by which his wish was realised, the State paying Rodin's son a small annuity as compensation for his lost inheritance.

Little remains to be told. On January 29, 1917, in circumstances of the most appalling discomfort, owing to the shortage of coal, Rodin was married to his faithful life-companion, Rose Beuret, in the Villa des Brillants, Meudon, surrounded by friends, whose chattering teeth must have made their congratulations almost incoherent.

Water-pipes had burst in the villa only a few hours before the ceremony, and the two septuagenarians sat shivering with cold while the

formalities of their marriage were hurried through by a bored official.

Scarcely a month later Madame Rodin died, and at 4 a.m. on November 17, 1917, Rodin followed her. He had been up and about five days before his death. According to some authorities, the death of both was undoubtedly hastened by the intolerable conditions prevailing at the Villa des Brillants in the winter of 1916–17, owing to the lack of fuel caused by war shortage in France.

CHAPTER II

FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF RODIN'S HOME

THERE is a certain stretch of hard white road in the environs of Paris, which, although it can lay claim to no transcendent beauty or arresting feature of any kind, will nevertheless remain vividly imprinted upon my memory. It is the direct road leading from the bank of the River Seine at Bas Meudon to the little village of Meudon Val Fleury, and beyond to the heights overlooking Issy-les-Moulineaux. I can never forget it, because it was along that stretch of road that, on a very hot morning in June, 1906, I accomplished what was to prove the most hurried and anxious journey of my life. On the morning in question I had to present myself before M. Rodin, and to take up my duties there and then as his secretary; and the appointment, which had been fixed for twelve noon, was to take place at his country house, the Villa des Brillants, at Meudon. I had most imprudently relied on directions given me by a friend in Paris who, while he professed himself familiar with Meudon, was, as I ultimately discovered, dismally ignorant of the precise position of M. Rodin's establishment. He had heard that the Villa des Brillants overlooked the river, and we both knew that it was in Meudon; what could

seem more reasonable, therefore, the day being very fine, than that I should travel by one of the delightful river steamers which, my friend informed me, plied between Meudon and Bercy ? It never occurred to me that a small and remote suburb of Paris, such as Meudon, with its compact dissyllabic name, could possibly be a large, straggling urban district, consisting of three distinct members, each separated from the other by a long stretch of road; nor was I in the least aware that Bas Meudon, the part at which I disembarked, and Rodin's Villa des Brillants constituted exactly the two extreme points bounding the whole area from north to south.

Thinking that if I reached Bas Meudon at about half-past eleven I should allow myself ample time to keep my appointment with impressive exactitude, I remained undismayed by the many halts that marked our progress along the Seine, and abandoned myself with serenity to the entertainment the journey afforded.

It was all a sad miscalculation. When I reached Bas Meudon, a little after half-past eleven—an hour when every French working-man is either at his *déjeuner* or on his way to it—I found myself practically alone on the little riverside quay; while the approach to it, together with the country beyond, appeared all the more desolate and lifeless for the silent splendour of the midday sun in which they were bathed. With great difficulty I was at last able to dis-

cover the distance that still separated me from my destination—to my horror it was well over two miles—and, as there was no sign of a vehicle of any description, nor any hope of obtaining one, I set off on foot as fast as I could, running and walking alternately, in the direction of Val Fleury. I had, not unnaturally, taken particular pains with my personal appearance that morning, and the road was long, dusty and burning. It is little to say, therefore, that I was vexed at having to make exertions which, even if I had been clad in flannels, must necessarily have impaired the freshness both of my clothes and of my person; but, as there was no alternative, and in any event I could not hope to arrive punctually before my new employer, it only remained to make the extent of my remissness as slight as possible.

It was a bad beginning! That was the thought that seemed to add extra weight to my limbs as I climbed the two steep hills along that memorable road; for not only was I about to meet for the first time a man who had agreed to employ me as his business assistant, but that man was also one of the most famous of his age. Thus the fact that I had had the folly to fritter away two or three days in Paris, amusing myself, while I might so easily have rehearsed the journey half a dozen times, did not tend to abate my annoyance.

At last, after having wasted much time in asking my way, I arrived, panting and footsore,

at the Villa des Brillants at about a quarter-past twelve, and with some trepidation asked whether I could see M. Rodin. Needless to say, the dusty appearance of my trousers, together with the apoplectic purple of my complexion, bore sufficiently eloquent testimony to the superhuman efforts I had made to retrieve my original error; and M. Rodin, whom I first met in the garden of his villa, was kind and human enough to make little of the delay. Observing me closely all the while, he merely smiled at the account of my desperate adventure, and contented himself with pointing out that I could have saved all my trouble and pains, if only I had thought of taking the elevated electric railway that runs from Les Invalides almost to the edge of his property.

Nevertheless, my frantic journey was not to prove quite useless; and all those prospective visitors to Rodin who very shortly after my arrival at the Villa des Brillants found themselves supplied with a neat printed sketch-map of the district, with full directions about the quickest route from Paris to the great sculptor's house, owed this assistance to my own distressing experience on that morning in June.

In a few moments " Madame " Rodin appeared —a frowning, tragic little figure, clad in a light *négligé;* and I was introduced to her. She seemed quite unable to take more than a perfunctory interest in my arrival, or in the capacity I was about to fill in M. Rodin's household;

but merely revealed that fanatical and anxious concern about doing the right thing by her lord and master, which, so I understand, characterised her until her last hour. Thus, she now urged him to go to his lunch as quickly as possible, so that he might catch his usual train to Paris; and, amid a noisy and general dispersal of the Rodin menagerie, consisting of ducks, pigeons and swans, we made our way, followed by the two dogs, Cap and Thérèse, to the dining-room of the villa. I was immediately struck by its plainness. But for a dozen white straight-backed chairs and a trestle table, the room was entirely bare; the walls, which were of a pale, even colour, stretched out on all sides with nothing but a picture by Falguière to relieve their reposeful monotony, and the floor was uncarpeted. Evidently Rodin must have observed the signs of faint astonishment in my expression, for he said, "You see, when I open the windows and the light and the landscape flood the room, it partakes of the pensive stillness of Nature. No obtrusive and artificial objects prevent it from harmonising with the fields and hills about me."

As he had often been to England before I became his private secretary, he was well aware that the austere simplicity of his establishment must strike me as a little singular, more particularly as at the time I joined him he was known to be in very flourishing circumstances. He therefore proceeded to inform me that if I failed

to discover anywhere about the house any of those arm- and easy-chairs such as he knew I must have been accustomed to in England, it was because he had a rooted objection to that semi-prone and folded-up self-indulgence of English comfort which such articles of furniture constantly suggested and encouraged. "I do not approve of half going to bed at all moments of the day," he declared. "When I am tired I go to bed altogether." And, indeed, this is what he really did; for on those nights when he had no function to attend in Paris, he always retired to bed at sundown.

Having much to learn and to observe during my first few weeks at Meudon, I was naturally very silent. But I soon found that Rodin was not in the least averse from bearing the whole burden of the conversation at table himself; and it struck me that he was a most brilliant and forcible talker. His speech was both laconic and pithy, and the effective manner in which he illuminated and disposed of every question he discussed riveted attention. Keeping his eyes averted from his listener, he would utter his short telling sentences with characteristic though quiet emphasis, and then, as he drew near to the conclusion of his remarks, he would cast one rapid glance at you, and with his face wreathed in smiles, invite you to join him in the pleasure he felt over the particular view he had expressed. I soon realised that he was as original and vigorous a thinker as he was a sculptor, and was

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VIEW OF THE VILLA DES BRILLANTS AND PART OF THE GROUNDS.

The villa stands on the right of the picture. In the centre is the large studio, which was originally the Rodin Pavilion at the 1900 Exhibition. The author's quarters were in the small white building on the left of the picture.

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not in the least surprised when later on I discovered that he would fain have been an author. He was also possessed of a quiet sardonic humour, and would laugh heartily at his own diatribes against his contemporaries. Unmerciful in his judgment of his age, his particular bugbear was the "Institut," whose members, especially when they were Academicians, came in for a good deal of his hostile criticism. "They hold the keys of the Heaven of Arts," he would often exclaim, "and close the door to all original talent! But," he would add with a withering scowl, "they themselves can never enter the Heaven of which they hold the keys."

He was also very fond of referring to the days when he was a poor struggling student in one of the small studios in the Rue des Fourneaux; for, although he occasionally had to suffer from hunger there, he was at least free from that incessant persecution which, in modern Europe, is the penalty of all recognised genius and all fame. "As a youth," he used to say, "I was a martyr to dyspepsia, and no treatment seemed to afford me the smallest relief. But I had not yet tasted of the uses of adversity. At the Rue des Fourneaux I suffered *une belle misère;* I often went for whole days without food, and lo, my dyspepsia was cured!"

I had a mass of correspondence to deal with at the Villa des Brillants, and wrote an average of thirty letters a day to keep abreast with it. I remember on one occasion a letter arrived which

was so badly written that neither Rodin nor I could decipher it. We turned it all ways, and could not even make out the signature. At last, after wasting a good deal of precious time, I was obliged to give it up, and laying the letter down on the table, announced my intention of waiting for a further communication from the writer, which I could only hope would prove more legible. "Not at all," said Rodin quietly, picking the letter up again, and smiling in his grimmest and most mischievous manner. "You will send it to a translation bureau, and ask them to translate it into English, and then when you get the translation you can read it back in French to me." We both laughed heartily at this ingenious suggestion, and it was carried out forthwith most successfully.

I was amazed at Rodin's orderliness and love of red tape. Having lived among artists all my life, I had grown to associate with the artistic temperament a certain carelessness and impatient hurry where the more tiresome details of every-day life were concerned, and I was therefore all the more surprised when I found in my chief a veritable *monstre paperassier*. Two whole rooms in the Villa des Brillants were given up to this passion for the accumulation and preservation of the letters, invoices, vouchers, estimates, and receipts of a lifetime, and these papers, stored in little white deal boxes, specially made for the purpose by a local carpenter, and arranged according to genus, species, date, and their

order in the alphabet, represented an imposing documentary record of all Rodin's relations with the outside world. It was curious to find this hereditary trait of the old bureaucrat in one who in every other respect must have been as unlike his father as possible, and I have often wondered what the French State did with these little white boxes stuffed with papers, when they took over the Musée Rodin.

Needless to say that the daily basketful of correspondence always included a fair proportion of begging letters, and it was my business to weed these out from the rest and to give Rodin a summary of their contents, together with the names of the writers. I soon understood, however, that the great master was not in the least inclined to pass over this part of the day's routine too perfunctorily. On the contrary, about all such correspondents residing in or around Paris he required the most exhaustive particulars, and always seemed very much annoyed when he found he could not reasonably acquiesce in their demands. As I knew him to be generous to a fault with his poorer friends, I was at first tempted to ascribe this concern to the fact that it was painful to him to thwart his natural impulses of charity and good-nature. I was, however, to some extent in error here; for ultimately I found out that he lived in constant fear of one day becoming the victim either of an avowed enemy or of one of these people whose demands he could not satisfy; and it was

not long before I was given a rather amusing proof of this.

One day a mysterious tin box came to Rodin from the Near East. It was handed to him while he was at lunch, and we all speculated upon what it might contain. One thought it was caviare, the other *pâté de foie gras*, and Rodin himself thought it might be merely a practical joke. On finding that he could not open it, he called for a pointed instrument, and Joseph, the studio-boy, went hurtling off to the studio in search of a chisel. Then, suddenly, a look of extraordinary guile and alarm entered Rodin's face, and turning to me, he said: "What if it were an infernal machine, designed to explode at the first heavy blow!" I laughed the suggestion to scorn, but Madame Rodin and the housekeeper, who had been listening intently all the while, looked anything but amused, and in a moment both of them were imploring Rodin to leave the tin box alone. Now, in addition to Rodin's constant fear of violence from the quarter of his enemies, or at the hands of a disappointed amateur in the art of pecuniary extortion (and it must be remembered that the famous affairs of the Age d'Airain and the Grand Penseur lent some colour to these fears), he had a childlike faith in the divinating power of the female mind. "One never knows," he would often say; "women frequently have the most unaccountable warnings of coming events. Call it what you will—second sight or telepathy;

but I for one am disinclined to regard the phenomenon as one of coincidence alone." Thus, it was quite plain that, on this occasion, the voice of his womenfolk, supporting as it did his own profound suspicions, supplied him with a very strong argument for refusing to tamper with the mysterious package; and by the time Joseph arrived with a screwdriver, the master's mind was made up. Joseph was therefore instructed to carry the tin to the farthest corner of the garden, and there to bury it forthwith; and, amid much laughter, the greater part of which was merely the expression of relieved alarm, we resumed our meal.

A few days afterwards there arrived a friendly letter from Greece, which had been unaccountably delayed in transit, and the writer of it announced to Rodin that he had dispatched a tin of the famous Hymettos honey to him, which, in view of the master's pronounced love of the ancient Greeks and everything connected with them, it was hoped that he would eat with particular relish. It is hardly necessary to add that the honey was not in the least impaired by its temporary inhumation.

Owing to the fact that all the examples of Rodin's principal works were collected at Meudon, we used to receive a stream of visitors there, many of whom, after having visited the huge studio, would stay to lunch. I, of course, always knew who was expected, and so did Madame Rodin, and I was frequently moved by the

extreme agitation shown by the poor little woman when she used to come to discuss the arrangements with me. She hated these functions as much as I loved them, and as she could not sympathise with my curiosity and interest about the guests, particularly when they were celebrities, she could only bewail the fact that these people insisted upon disturbing her in her peaceful rural retreat. She also had strange notions about dress on these occasions, and was always utterly at a loss about the correct thing to wear when a particularly famous celebrity was invited. I remember on one occasion when M. Leygues, the Colonial Minister, was coming, she thought it necessary, in view of the eminence of the visitor, to make a specially noble effort in her apparel; and to Rodin's horror, he espied her just before lunch through the open door of the studio crossing the garden in a brilliant confection of crimson silk or satin. I was immediately summoned to the studio by the master, and, leading me aside, in a few hurried sentences he ordered me to prevail upon Madame Rodin to change her dress instantly, and to adopt a quieter garment, no matter how long her change of toilet might delay the meal. It was a delicate mission to fulfil; but feeling that it was in the interest of everybody to make it a success, I went in search of Madame Rodin, determined not to shrink from the difficult path of duty. I found her finishing the floral decoration of the table, and, summoning all my firmness and tact,

I told her that M. Rodin had requested me to speak a few words to her. Seeing that she was, as I have already pointed out, fanatically devoted to the master, my task was really not so hard as it might seem; and after assuring her that M. Rodin thought that M. Leygues was hardly worthy of the exceptional efforts she had made, and that there would certainly be many occasions in the future when a guest of even greater distinction would require to be adequately honoured, I informed her that M. Rodin thought it would be wise to reserve her present toilet for such an opportunity, and that for M. Leygues a quieter dress would be all that was wanted. I added that M. Rodin did not mind if the lunch were a little late, provided she carried out his suggestion. To my great joy she did not attempt to argue the point; and, beyond looking a little puzzled by the fact that M. Rodin had not seen eye to eye with her in this particular matter, went off instantly to effect the desired change in her attire.

Now, it was at these luncheons that Rodin used always to be at his best, and seeing that almost every celebrity in the world attended them, from the President of the Argentine Republic to the Editor of the comic French journal *Le Rire*, these functions constituted the most enthralling feature of my life at the great sculptor's house. The conversation was of the most varied character, for Rodin could talk well and interestingly on almost any subject; but it

was naturally on art or literature that he spoke with the greatest understanding, and all his more intelligent visitors invariably directed the conversation along these lines. I remember, on one occasion, while discussing English literature, Rodin happened to compare the merits of Richardson with those of Fielding, and I was very much surprised to find that, like Dr. Samuel Johnson, he preferred the former. "Yes," he said, "*Tom Jones* wearies me; for irony in the long run is tedious. Fielding is ruthless with humanity—*il est méchant.* How much more enjoyable is the ingenuous feeling and tender humanity of *Pamela!*" Those who remember Boswell will realise how very much this resembles Johnson's own view. "Sir," said the Doctor, addressing the young Scots officer, Erskine, "there is more knowledge of the heart in one letter of Richardson than in all *Tom Jones.*"*

This, however, should be observed in mitigation of the above severe judgment against Fielding, that Rodin had read *Pamela*, translated by a master *littérateur*—the Abbé Prévost—whereas he had read *Tom Jones*, if not in an inferior translation, at least in a version that could not aspire to the literary beauty attained by the author of *Manon Lescaut.*

At all events, Rodin never pronounced a criticism of this kind in a spirit of arrogance or captiousness. He was in many respects a modest man, and it was only in regard to his own par-

* See Birkbeck Hill's *Boswell*, vol. ii., p. 174.

ticular branch of art that he allowed himself to speak, as it were, with authority and defiance. Indeed, so modest was his habit of mind that he delighted in expatiating on his own shortcomings, and would often entertain his listeners with stories about his lack of after-dinner eloquence, his absent-mindedness, and his indifference to dress. One story which he was particularly fond of repeating against himself even bore relation to his personal appearance. As most people are aware, he was a very big, heavy man, with a powerful head and unusually large hands and feet. Now, on one occasion he had been invited by a prominent official in the Ministry of Mines to go down a coal mine somewhere in the French industrial area; and Rodin, as I hope to show, being always interested in the work and circumstances of the industrial classes, readily acquiesced in the suggestion. When, however, it came to equipping him for the descent underground, to everybody's astonishment, including, as he confessed, his own, not a pair of miner's boots could be found large enough to fit him. The very largest sizes were sent for; but in vain; and amid much laughter, in which Rodin heartily joined, he was obliged to prevail upon the officials to allow him to descend into the mine in his ordinary foot-gear.

His nature was a peculiar mixture of apparently irreconcilable extremes. On the one hand, he had strong monarchical sympathies, which made him wax quite rabid about the regicides of

January, 1793, and caused him to predict all kinds of ills for France as the inevitable penalty for the crimes she then committed; and, on the other, he revealed the most tender concern for the welfare and character of the common folk. In this respect he was rather like our own William Cobbett; for, while the artist in him led him to cling with conservative ardour to tradition and to all the institutions which would make beauty and patriarchal order prevail against the ever-encroaching ugliness and anarchy of modern industrialism, he would often speak about the lot of the common workman very much as we are accustomed to hear our own Socialists and Labour leaders speak to-day. For instance, in regard to modern democratic assemblies, he was as ruthless in his criticism as the most hide-bound Tory. "Since I have become well known," he would say, "circumstances have compelled me to do a great deal of work on committees and deliberative bodies of all kinds; and my invariable conclusion on leaving them has been that the ruling majority in all such gatherings hardly ever consists of the ablest and most original thinkers present. Now, applying the results of my own experience to the committees that rule the destinies of modern democracies, I wonder whether the same rule applies. It is with the utmost difficulty that a body of men can be induced to work harmoniously in the highest interests of an ordinary art society or club; but is the difficulty supposed

to vanish when men, instead of transacting the minor affairs of a friendly society, administer the more complicated business of a large and powerful State ?"

Now listen to him on his return from a visit to one of the larger French transatlantic liners, which had just been built at about the time I joined him at Meudon: " Everything was wonderful; but I confess I was appalled by the almost total lack of consideration for the baser human elements in the great machine. Take the huge stoke-holes, for instance ! If the engineers who designed that ship had built the furnaces with the view of having them fed by princes and dukes, or even by wealthy commoners, we should have seen these infernos fitted with every modern appliance for securing the comfort of the men. We should have seen special cooling apparatus, electric fans and ingenious devices for keeping continuous and effective ventilation there; while in the compartments adjoining the stoke-holes we should not have been surprised to find a canteen dispensing cooling drinks and ices at all moments of the day. But," he exclaimed, smiling sadly, " of course there was not a trace of anything of the sort ! We did not need to ask who the poor devils were who were expected to do that work !"

Although I was quartered at some distance from the Villa des Brillants, in a little three-roomed cottage all to myself, standing within Rodin's property, I shared Rodin's home life

exactly like one of the family, and had every opportunity of becoming acquainted with his daily routine and habits of thought. Called at seven o'clock every morning, I was expected to have finished my breakfast and be ready at his side at eight precisely. Rodin was an early riser, and very often in the summer he would be out in the garden, clad in his old *houppelande*, soon after six o'clock. His breakfast usually consisted either of hot bread and milk or else a bowl of sour milk; indeed, it was at Meudon that I first heard of Metchnikoff's theories concerning this preparation, and Rodin, who was convinced of its value as a food, strongly urged me to take it, which I frequently did. After breakfast—that is to say, a little before eight o'clock—a hairdresser would arrive from Val Fleury to trim Rodin's hair and beard for the day; and, taking his place beside me at a plain deal table, in a room adjoining the dining-room, Rodin would open and read his letters, while the hairdresser set to work. After the trimming was done, the hairdresser would wash the master's head with a peculiarly pungent and not very pleasant hair-wash, and finally, with brush and comb, make him ready for the reception of guests or other business. Rodin never liked to spend more time over his correspondence than it took the barber to complete his hairdressing; consequently our first business interview of the day usually terminated with the little barber's "*Voilà, Monsieur, c'est fini.*"

The morning was usually spent by Rodin in his huge studio, built of iron and stucco, adjoining the Villa des Brillants, and it was there that he used to receive his guests. I was only called to him when either English or German visitors came, who required the assistance of an interpreter; but if his visitors happened to be unexpected callers—ladies of either English or American nationality—it was also my duty, after interviewing them and before ushering them into the studio, to call the studio-boy, Joseph, and proceed with him to a discreet concealment of certain pieces among the exhibits, by means of large dust-sheets that were always lying about in readiness for such an emergency.

At twelve midday, lunch was served. It was a very simple and wholesome meal, for Rodin delighted in homely dishes, and, like most artists, was a very temperate man. Beginning with *hors-d'œuvre*, we usually had some kind of joint, either roasted or braised, then a preparation of eggs or vegetables, or both, followed by cheese, fruit, and the usual coffee. The liquor drunk at table consisted of good light claret or white wine, and Rodin's favourite liqueur was Cointreau. He smoked very little, usually half of a "Boc" cigar, which he seemed hardly to enjoy, and then he went off by train to his studio in Paris, which, at the time I was with him, was in the Rue de l'Université. There he had either a sitter or else a visitor awaiting him, and, as a rule, he did not return to Meudon until half-

past five or six o'clock in the evening. Now this was the most critical hour of the day for me, for it was at this time that he signed the letters, and attended to all such questions as the payment of workmen and models, outstanding accounts and the moneys received from clients. In all these matters he revealed an almost fretful meticulousness, which at first surprised and sometimes offended me; but I discovered that he had so often been cheated or otherwise taken advantage of by one of my predecessors, that he had learned to be most scrupulously careful. The first inkling I had of this was on the occasion of the dismissal of a certain workman, a plasterer, who had been in his employ before I came upon the scene. One morning Rodin informed me that he had dismissed him, and that he would be leaving on the evening of that day. Towards six o'clock, therefore, I called the man to pay him, out of petty cash, the money still owing to him; but he informed me that Rodin in a passion had given him his wages that morning. Now, when at the end of the week, in settling my accounts with him, Rodin discovered not only that my petty cash account showed an unusually large balance, but also that I made no mention of any payment to the dismissed plasterer, he asked me for an explanation. I then told him that the workman had informed me that he had received his money from M. Rodin himself, and that this accounted for my having more than the usual amount in

hand. Thereupon, to my amazement—for I had no reason to suspect that my behaviour was anything else than what he had been accustomed to—Rodin, with a radiant smile, thanked me most heartily for having reminded him of the fact that he had paid the man himself, and even used the expression, "*C'est vraiment bien aimable à vous de me le dire*"—meaning, obviously, I presumed, that he would not have wondered much if I had not done so and had recorded the payment as having been made by myself. Naturally I protested against the implication of his apparently fulsome expression of gratitude over a proceeding so normal; and then it was that he first gave me to understand the kind of treatment that he had suffered in the past.

His day's work over, in the cool of the evening Rodin used generally to wander off with his favourite dog, Cap, to some quiet corner of the garden, for rest and meditation; and at this hour he liked no one to disturb him. Usually taking up a position on one of the highest points in his large garden, he would sit there, looking across the valley of the Seine to Sèvres in the distance; and while quietly contemplating the beautiful landscape before him would await the dusk. He was much given to meditation and to the silent and prolonged contemplation of nature or a beautiful work of art, and in the early days, before I was acquainted with his ways, I used constantly to fall foul of him, precisely in

regard to this habit. Suffering from an excess of zeal, and holding also the foolish belief that good form, or at least decent manners, required that I should, when alone with Rodin, endeavour to divert his mind with some light extempore remarks suggested either by the world about us or by a passing thought, I used at first to make such efforts in small talk or light conversation as the usages of polite society in England make almost *de rigueur*. I might have spared myself the pains! Nor shall I ever forget the first check I received, while engaged in this well-intentioned but ridiculous practice. We were travelling together from Meudon to Paris on the elevated electric line, the terminus of which is Les Invalides station on the Quai d'Orsay. I had been with Rodin about a week, and I was still too full of zeal and over-anxious to do the right thing to be altogether self-possessed. Now, I noticed that during the first part of the journey the Eiffel Tower was on our left, while during the latter part it appeared on our right—a circumstance which, though easily explained as the natural consequence of the winding of the railway line, struck me as being sufficiently singular to supply the occasion for a remark. The irresponsible behaviour of the Eiffel Tower on this journey, moreover, happening to coincide with what I believed to be an acute lull in the conversation, I abandoned all caution, and proceeded to comment on the obvious fact. It was extremely foolish of me. I realised that the

moment I had uttered the words. But, having uttered them, I felt it in some way a point of honour to stand by them, and to vindicate my parental pride in them by forcing attention to them. Rodin took not the slightest notice. I flushed a little. The very imbecility of my child made me resent this insult to it. I repeated the remark in a somewhat modified form. Rodin turned away his big head, and again made no sign of having heard.

I made no third attempt; but, feeling thoroughly abashed, and knowing full well that my punishment had been a just one, reformed my ways from that hour. Many such useful lessons did I learn during my period of close association with this great artist; nor did it ever occur to me to doubt that his taste in such matters was a thousand times more reliable than the usages of the modern world, with all its imposing authority of tradition and so-called good form.

CHAPTER III

RODIN'S CRITICISM OF THE AGE

"WE are the penultimates!" ("*Nous sommes les avant-derniers!*")—thus used Rodin to sum up his criticism of his age. At the time I was with him, the neo-Impressionist school was just coming to the fore: Gauguin and Van Gogh were becoming celebrities; and with some apprehension Rodin saw all the old canons and traditions of art being blasted to the four winds. He had little hope for the future, and in the sense that he could see about him but few whose conscience was in their work as wholly as his was, he was probably right in regarding himself as an *avant-dernier*. I have seen him dismiss an assistant and his work a dozen times with the request, "Please, Mr. X., go and study that a little more closely!"—not a hint of what was wrong, not a suggestion of how to put it right—simply "*étudiez cela encore un peu!*" It might have been a hand, a leg, a baby's head—no matter! Rodin spoke as a workman who knew what arduous tasks he had once imposed upon himself, and was not prepared to pass slipshod or unconscientious work produced by others.

His own fastidious and searching study of planes in his modelling was proof enough of the immense seriousness and pains with which he

approached the simple craft of his calling, and he was quick to detect cardboard effects (*effets de carton*) in the modelling of his contemporaries or assistants. As a tribute to his artistic conscience, a story which he used cheerfully to tell against himself concerning his magnificent bust of Henri Rochefort is worth mentioning here. As everybody knows, Henri Rochefort was not only the impetuous and fearless editor of the *Intransigeant*, he was also a busy politician. He could, therefore, ill afford the time that Rodin needed in order to produce one of his laboriously accurate and lifelike busts. Thus, growing weary of the repeated sittings, and quite misunderstanding the artist's untiring exactness in his work, Rochefort gave his own account to the world of what took place in Rodin's studio. "I go to Monsieur Rodin in the morning," he said, "and with infinite pains the sculptor at last decides to place a tiny little pellet of clay (*une toute petite boulette*) somewhere on the face of my bust. I return in the afternoon, and with the same infinite pains M. Rodin at last decides to remove that very same pellet! And so it goes on and on!"

In view of this conscientiousness, which was proverbial, it will surprise no one to hear that Rodin distrusted so-called "moments of inspiration." The rigorous honesty of his scientific mind caused him to fear precisely that which the romantic artist most ardently covets and waits for: the exalted mood, the lambent eyes, and the quivering nostril of creative passion. With the

artists who rely on such attacks of frenzy, and produce their masterpieces as if some higher power were whispering in their ear, directing their judgment and guiding their hand, Rodin had no more sympathy than if he had been a city financier. Like the celebrated actor, Coquelin Aîné, he was convinced that great artistic feats were only possible through knowledge and a perfect understanding of the technique of the art he mastered. "Inspired moments," he would say, "by inducing a condition akin to intoxication, may cause the artist to forget the very principles on which the adequate interpretation of his idea most certainly depends." If, therefore, Rodin seemed at times to exaggerate his modelling or to leave rough excrescences of clay upon his figures, as if in the hurry of exaltation and inspired fervour, we should always remember that these artifices were all deliberate and completely conscious, and that he would have scorned to find, as the romantic artist frequently does, in his more sober moments of reflection, that his work contained either more or less than he had actually intended to put into it. "Sculpture is an art of hollows and projections" (*de creux et de bosses*), he repeated again and again, and one of the fundamental rules of his technique was that these hollows and projections should be calmly and coldly determined, and that their intensification, if such were needed, should be the outcome rather of deliberation than of chance.

Alinari Photo.

MEDITATION (LA PENSÉE).

Many people have called attention to Rodin's ardent love of Nature, and then pointed to his work as if a good deal of it appeared to contradict rather than to confirm this love. Such critics are inclined to argue that when the love of Nature presides, as it did in Rodin, over all other emotions, a greater fidelity to Nature's own forms might reasonably be expected in the work it inspired. But the anomaly here, if anomaly there be, surely resides in the minds of these critics themselves. Rodin would have told them that he saw Nature more vital, more highly energetic, than they did. He saw it as it is—that is to say, *alive*, with the sap of life running through its forms. Once he explained to me why, in "La Pensée" (a head in a cap, resting on a block of marble), he had left the marble block on which the head reposes in a rough state. He said it was an experiment. He wished to see whether he could make the head so exuberantly alive, so thoroughly pulsating with life, that it imparted vitality even to the inert mass of marble beneath it. "I wanted the marble below to look as if the blood from that head were circulating through it," were Rodin's words. And all those who have examined this piece of sculpture at the Luxemburg Museum will, I imagine, agree that he has succeeded in his aim.

With regard to the curious little nodules that occasionally appear, particularly on the heads of his figures, he offered the same explanation. "The marble or the bronze," he would say,

" can represent the dead form; but we who look on a live creature realise that it is pulsating with life, that the skin quivers with the blood beneath it." It was in his effort to obtain that quivering of the living flesh, that he made, among other modifications of the surface of his busts, those deliberate accidents in the modelling.

Truth to tell, his love of Nature was the most powerful passion of his being. He studied her with all the humility and devotion of a Hindu *chela.* " *Quelle science merveilleuse !*" he would exclaim, when brought face to face with one of Nature's marvels; and then, shaking his head, he would smile resignedly, as if, despite his long and arduous study of her, she continued to baffle him. I remember the first occasion on which he used this expression to me. One of his ducks had made it quite plain to us, by her long and conspicuous spells of absence from the garden, that she must have built a secret nest somewhere, and that in this unknown retreat she was intending to rear a brood of young ones. A former brood she had hatched had been entirely destroyed by the dogs, and she was evidently determined that this time she would secure her young ones' safety by absolute privacy. No one could trace the position of her nest; for, although she would always appear at feeding-time, when once she had eaten her share and slaked her thirst she would as regularly waddle off again, as quietly and as unostentatiously as possible, and remain hidden for the rest of the day. Now

Rodin and I tried several times to follow her, but always without success. The moment she became aware that anyone was watching her movements, she merely set off upon an apparently purposeless exploration of the whole property and, resting nowhere, would lead her pursuers such a dance that they were glad to abandon their object. Then when she was perfectly satisfied that she was not being followed, she would waddle silently away to her mysterious haunt. It was only after this resourceful creature had hopelessly defeated us again and again, that Rodin at last turned to me and exclaimed with more joy than irritation: "*Quelle science merveilleuse!*"

This love of Nature doubtless accounted not only for the extreme simplicity of Rodin's home, but also for the rigid plainness of his taste in food and entertainment. From the standpoint of his Nature-worship he judged all things, and was in this respect the ideal antithesis of Whistler, who thought that Nature was usually wrong. For instance, Rodin used occasionally to visit the Palais Royal to have one of the 3.50 fr. luncheons there. He did this no longer from *gourmandise*, but chiefly because the Palais Royal itself is beautiful, and he was sentimentally disinclined to abandon an old habit which in former days had afforded him great pleasure. Whenever he returned from such a meal, however, it was Madame Rodin and I who had to bear the brunt of the indignation he felt over everything

connected with it; and the whole of the evening he would groan over the stupidity and vulgarity of a generation that could allow so marked a deterioration in quality to pass unperceived and uncorrected by them. "Ah, the food is no longer what it used to be!" he would exclaim. "It is downright bad. They manage to spoil the simplest things—even poor plain French beans!" ("*Ils savent abîmer les choses les plus simples—même nos pauvres haricots verts nature!*") Of the garish and very fashionable restaurants along the Boulevards, he also had little good to say. "These are shops," he would cry, "fit for *pignoufs!* One cannot blame their proprietors. If people will be *pignoufs*, it is just as well that there should be men about who know how to treat them as such!"

Rodin's great reverence for Nature, and his keen appreciation of the "all-pervading domain of mystery which is everywhere under our feet and among our hands," formed the basis of his religious convictions; for the fact that he was a profoundly religious man may be gathered from his very works themselves. Such pieces as "The Creation of Man," "The Hand of God" and "The Creation of Woman" bear sufficiently eloquent testimony of his pious spirit, while his treatment of such subjects as the "St. John" reveals his deep understanding of the momentous epoch for which it stands. The Bible, too, was one of his favourite *livres de chevet*, and he delighted in expounding his own subtle inter-

pretations of many of its passages. "How foolish people must be not to see the truth in this book!" he often declared. "Its pages teem with morals that are perennially modern!"

The condition of the Church in France was a source of the gravest anxiety to the author of "Le Grand Penseur"; and he deplored the dissolution of the religious societies, which deprived poor children of the teaching afforded to them by these bodies. He believed that the young and the illiterate of all nations require dogma, and that the art underlying the ritual of the Holy Catholic Church had a refining influence upon the mind of all classes. Thus he regarded the steady decline of the Church in France as a distressing sign of the times.

One of his favourite excursions on Sunday afternoon was to go to Paris to attend Vespers at Notre Dame, and those of the congregation who did not know him must often have been puzzled by the venerable old gentleman who, sitting with his eyes shut and his chin resting on his chest, listened so attentively to the service. He loved beautiful buildings; he was also very fond of ecclesiastical music; but, above all, he was happy to share the religious emotions of the congregation and to feel the influence of the old-world gravity and calm. Nor was he in the least vague about his conception of the Deity. He seemed able to reconcile a robust pantheism with a very real sense of God as a Person, as an Eternal Father, and would gently rebuke any-

one who, wishing to adapt religion to modern notions, extended the idea of God to an all-pervading impersonal Power. Once, whilst conversing with a lady about the petty annoyances of human life, and the tendency that each man has to magnify his own woes until they appear to him events of almost universal importance, the lady happened to make a remark concerning the Deity which revealed the rationalistic tendency to remove Him ever farther and farther away from human concerns. She said: "How God must laugh sometimes at our self-conceit and the pretentiousness of our little joys and woes!" Rodin smiled indulgently at his guest, but it was quite plain that he was not pleased. "Laugh?" he enquired reproachfully—"laugh? But is it not belittling God to suppose that He could *laugh* at poor creatures like ourselves? Should we consider it dignified to laugh at the blind wrigglings of a poor earthworm, whether we knew it to be happy or miserable?"

On another occasion, a certain lady visitor happened to express her disapproval of the principle of self-sacrifice, and maintained that where it achieved no lasting good it should be discouraged. As an instance of what she meant, she described a certain family of her acquaintance, in whose household a particularly undesirable form of self-sacrifice was constantly exhibited. The mother, it appeared, was a bedridden old lady, who had as her permanent attendant and companion her youngest daughter,

a young woman of marriageable age, and both healthy and attractive. Now, argued Rodin's lady friend, who evidently held decidedly utilitarian views, surely it was to be deplored that there was no legislation, or public tradition, which could prevent a young and useful life from wearing itself away in such unproductive and depressing toil, however sublimely unselfish that toil might be. By the time the grave released the mother from her life of pain, her devoted daughter, broken and debilitated by her life of sacrifice, must stand alone as the mere waste product of the whole of the unhappy arrangement.

Rodin listened attentively, as was his wont; and, when asked for his own views on the question, replied as follows: "Certainly, I agree with you, Mademoiselle, that the loss to the world of such a young and beautiful life is very lamentable. I think, as you do, that it is not a pleasant sight to watch a youthful and desirable creature wearing herself away in a gloomy sick-room. But have you thought of the alternative? That is what we have to consider. Is it not a thousand times better that one person, like the young woman you speak of, should be broken and debilitated by a life of self-sacrifice, than that the principle for which she strove—the principle of filial piety—should vanish from this cruel world and leave suffering humanity very much poorer than it is at present?"

It has been said that a true genius is always

a multiple or universal genius—that is to say, that although the exigencies of his early life may have forced him to adopt, and become proficient in, the technique of a particular art or science, there are latent in him the qualities and powers which would have made him distinguished in any calling. Certainly this was true of Rodin, than whom nobody could have shown greater versatility or more complete catholicity of taste and sympathies. He painted with extreme vigour and frankness. Indeed, some of the landscapes that I found lying about in odd corners at the Villa des Brillants struck me as being so beautiful, that I persuaded him to have them framed and preserved—an idea that apparently had not occurred to him before I suggested it; and although I do not know what has happened to these *barbouillages*, as he modestly called them, if they still exist they probably occupy the very same frames that I selected for them. I have already mentioned his literary tastes, which were pronounced, and I have shown too that he was a good and forcible speaker. In music, moreover, he also had the most cultivated and fastidious taste, and counted many friends among the prominent musicians of his day. True, his views on this subject were a trifle old-fashioned, and he preferred to hear his friend and biographer, Mlle. Cladel, play Palestrina or Mozart to him on the valuable old spinet that stood in the studio at Meudon, rather than listen to the best modern profes-

sionals playing modern music; but he always discussed music with very profound understanding, and held strong views upon the use of music in education. Indeed, it was largely his love of music that caused him sometimes to speak, if not bitterly, at least unflatteringly about his great contemporary McNeill Whistler; for if the latter complained of Rodin's work as not being "statuesque," and thought that the great sculptor was inclined occasionally to be a little obscene, Rodin could hardly control himself when speaking about Whistler's "eternal gramophone."

Personally, I was always convinced that there was not much love lost between the two men; but I should not go so far as to suggest that Whistler started his gramophone purposely to annoy Rodin, whenever the latter visited him, although this is rather what Rodin suspected. It is far more likely that, as the two men had but little in common, the bright and resourceful American had recourse to the gramophone whenever Rodin appeared as a means of relieving the tenseness of a situation which, otherwise, would probably have proved intolerable to both of them. At all events, Rodin never allowed his annoyance at Whistler's peculiar taste in music to override his better judgment in his appreciation of Whistler's art; for I used to hear him again and again extolling Whistler's *beau dessin* to people who deliberately questioned him on the matter; and this opinion he expressed

just as sincerely as he stigmatised his friend Renoir's drawing as atrocious.

Behind Rodin's horror of the gramophone, however, there was something deeper than the mere prejudice of a cultivated musician, and that was his instinctive loathing of everything that typified the alleged " Progress " of Western civilisation. He constantly expressed his delight at the thought that he might not live long enough to witness the complete development of the aeroplane, and, whenever one of these aerial machines hovered above the Villa des Brillants, as they frequently did, owing to the close vicinity of the Versailles aerodrome, the sight of it always depressed him. " Our last remaining peaceful view," he used to exclaim, " will vanish with these aerial monsters !" He also hated the automobile and all its concomitant evils. Quite apart from its interference with peaceful pedestrianism in rural districts, which he deplored, he made this remarkable prophecy concerning it—a prophecy which it is not impossible we are feeling the truth of in England to-day—namely, that the oil and smells emitted everywhere by the motor-car would ultimately be sure to modify insect life in Europe, and probably kill the bee industry, by terrifying the bees—those artists in scent—into complete inaction. Although he was sufficiently well off to keep a car, he resolutely refused to buy one, and was content to drive along the local country lanes, and about the Bois de Meudon, in his own victoria, drawn

by a quiet old horse, which in its off hours could pose for him as steadily as an antique sculpture, and driven by an ancient veteran of the box, whose daily work rarely occupied more than two and a half hours.

" The idea of Progress is Society's worst form of cant !" he used to say. " We undoubtedly see advancement, but it is all in one direction, and science, from being a shy and derided harbinger of greater happiness, has become an overweening tyrant that bewilders and masters us. How pleased everybody is with the feats of our engineers ! Machines, by doing man's work, were going to save time; and indeed, we have ever so much more time on our hands now than we had formerly ! Machinery was going to be man's mute slave. But is the stoker who sweats and drinks his life away in the suffocating stoke-hole of a transatlantic liner the lord of the machinery about him ?"

Sometimes his views would recall Cobbett, Ruskin, William Morris, or Samuel Butler, more particularly when he spoke of the influence of machinery upon the masses of all modern industrial communities. " Formerly," he would say, " part of the workman's natural reward for the work he did was an access of intelligence, skill, and ability, and a corresponding increase in self-confidence. The cobbler who gradually learnt to mould leather round a foot with ever multiplied skill became a master in his special branch of industry; and, what was more, could

transmit his acquired virtuosity to his offspring. This was the divine guerdon of his work, provided, of course, that it entailed a fair amount of mental and physical effort, and conduced to a higher degree of active co-ordination of muscle and brain. But whither has this co-ordination of muscle and brain gone to-day? In modern industry, and in most forms of modern locomotion, the workman, in a large number of cases, does little more than move a lever from left to right—the machine does the rest. The machines working in France at the present moment must be legion; but what has become of the divine guerdon for the labourer's work? Machines cannot develop intelligence. They certainly accomplish what is needed; but who acquires greater expertness from their labours, whose muscles and brains learn ever more subtle and intricate co-ordination from their production? Time is outwitted; money is accumulated; but someone has to pay heavily for these triumphs, and it is the working classes who are paying—with their brains. The very highest boast of Progress, therefore—mechanical perfection—is preparing the road back to barbarism! We sneer at Socialism; but, with all its glaring absurdities, it is taking an ever stronger hold upon the minds of the people. Why is this? Obviously because, to the modern working man who turns a lever from left to right and back again all his life, Socialism sounds the most godlike wisdom, and seems the very quintessence

of sound and mature political thought and theory."

But let it not be supposed that Rodin's lack of sympathy with many of the tendencies of his age led him to hold himself aloof from his contemporaries, or to entertain uncharitable notions concerning his race. On the contrary, his sociability and good feeling were notorious; nor was his general judgment of his fellows a particularly harsh one. To Carlyle's famous stricture regarding the proportion of fools among the population of the British Isles, Rodin replied as follows: "Unjustly compared with hypothetical angels of omniscience, men are perhaps both foolish and vain, but placed side by side with the other creatures of the higher animal world, among whom they rank but as a remote superior family branch, men are marvellously, divinely intelligent."

Only very occasionally did this highly gifted artist express contempt for the stupidity of his less fortunate brethren, and that was when, acting as a crowd, they caused their opinion to prevail concerning matters which they were hardly equipped to judge. Then his own early experiences, and the fate of Phidias at the hands of the envious and rapacious Athenians, would occur to his mind, and raising his hand in horror to his eyes, as if to shut out the image of the world's vulgarity, he would ejaculate, "*Que le monde est bête !*"

During the time that I was with him, he

certainly seemed to enjoy extraordinarily good health, and I never knew him to consult a doctor. True, he had not much faith in orthodox medicine, and on the few occasions when he was slightly indisposed, either owing to a cold or a migraine, he was much more inclined to have recourse to what he called *les remèdes de bonnes femmes*, than to call for professional medical assistance. Madame Rodin, who, like most Frenchwomen of the old school, had inherited that knowledge of homely remedies which used to be handed down from mother to daughter throughout the length and breadth of France, was thoroughly acquainted with these "old-wives'" remedies, most of which she would obtain from the local *herboriste;* and infusions of *bourrache*, *tilleul*, *queues de cerises* or *camomille*, always seemed sufficient to restore Rodin's health, whenever he required special treatment of any kind.

I had, of course, ample opportunities of observing the relationship that existed between the great sculptor and the woman who was his closest companion during practically the whole of his adult life, and I have no hesitation in saying that it was an exceedingly happy one. Naturally, however, it had to be viewed from the proper standpoint, and due allowance made for the great disparity in cultivation and intellectual power between the two people. Regarded from the angle of a modern match between social equals, and with all the bias that modern feminism has fostered in favour of woman's

so-called freedom, independence, or what-not, it might very easily have struck one or two of our latter-day young women with horror. But this would have amounted to judging it according to a totally wrong standard, and one, moreover, to which both Rodin himself and Madame Rodin would have scorned to aspire. Madame Rodin who, very soon after my first appearance at the Villa des Brillants, paid me the honour of confiding in me concerning most of her difficulties and anxieties, hardly ever complained either about her mode of life or about the treatment she received at the hands of her lord and master; and her devotion seemed to set no limit to the services she cheerfully performed for him. Occasionally she might perhaps come to me, lamenting over the many harassing engagements and activities that sometimes conspired to ruffle Rodin's temper; or she might in a rare mood of revolt comment bitterly upon his thoughtlessness in asking her to put on his boots directly after luncheon, instead of before the meal, as the effort of bending over his feet and buttoning his boots, so soon after eating, disturbed her digestion. But never did I hear anything more serious than this, and even complaints of this kind were rare. She was an ingenuous and primitive creature, scarcely able to realise the exalted position her distinguished mate had conquered for himself among the artistic and cultured communities of the whole world; and perhaps always grieving a little secretly over the

altered circumstances of the poor struggling sculptor who, having emerged from that obscurity which had once made him completely her possession, had become a public figure and institution, in whose active relations to the world outside she could not participate.

I shall never forget the incident that first brought her confiding helplessness vividly before me. It happened shortly after I had entered Rodin's employ. I was sitting in the little study adjoining the dining-room one afternoon, dealing with the correspondence for the day, when Madame Rodin entered, and in tones of great timidity asked whether I could possibly find time to write a letter for her. Realising instantly that, however much I might feel disposed, on other grounds, to oblige the old lady, my very position as private secretary to Rodin must necessarily involve the duty of transacting Madame Rodin's business as well, I eagerly acquiesced, and, pushing aside my other work, begged her to explain what it was she wished me to do. She then began to dictate to me a long letter to a near relative of her own, in which she entered into so many details of an intimate and private nature that I could not help wondering, as I wrote, whether Rodin would be likely to approve of my becoming apprised in this adventitious fashion of matters which were obviously not my business. It was impossible to write like a machine, without any intelligent concern about what I was writing; it was there-

fore quite out of the question that I should retain no knowledge of what was being dictated to me. Before three pages had been covered, therefore, I thought it only proper to interrupt Madame Rodin, and to ask her whether M. Rodin might not possibly disapprove of my hearing in that haphazard way all the details that she was unfolding in the letter. She frowned, and her eyes glared, very much as they glare in the "Bellona," for which she originally posed. "But most certainly not!" she exclaimed. "M. Rodin will not mind. He knows perfectly well that I cannot write!"

Nevertheless, whether Madame Rodin was as illiterate as she maintained or not, she was certainly indispensable to the great man with whom her lot in life was cast; and, in addition to securing him his creature comforts, she performed a hundred services for him with which none but a devoted and reliable disciple could have been entrusted. Foremost among her more responsible activities, for instance, was that of keeping Rodin's clay moist and workable, particularly when he happened to be engaged upon an important bust, for which the sittings were limited. Then, as Rodin often assured me, there was no one whom he preferred to Madame Rodin for this delicate responsibility. She certainly knew how to swathe those priceless models in their moist linen cloths, with all the care of a loving mother, and when she was engaged on this work she really felt herself to be an essen-

tial factor in the great sculptor's productive energy.

This, as a rule, was the final task of the day, and whilst Madame Rodin in one corner of the studio was busy accomplishing it, Rodin and I, if it were dark enough, would wander off to another part, in order to examine by candle-light either an antique sculpture recently purchased, or a piece of his own work in course of completion. This examination by the light of a candle, which was an elaborate operation, constituted an important part of Rodin's technique, and it is worth describing. Candle in hand, I would walk very slowly round the piece of sculpture to be examined—say, at the rate of a step every ten seconds—and Rodin about a yard and a half behind me, so that straight lines drawn from our respective positions to the sculpture would form approximately a right angle, would follow me round at the same pace. Keeping his eyes fixed upon the sculpture the whole time, and taking the most careful note of what he called *les profiles*—that is to say, the various contours of the sculpture in different positions, forced into sharp definition by the light of the single flame I bore—it was thus that he formed an accurate judgment of the planes of the various pieces that he had acquired, or was actually producing. And, according to the success with which a particular piece of sculpture survived this searching scrutiny, it was pronounced either *très beau*, *beau*, or merely

médiocre. If, however, the beauty of the workmanship were such as to call for an unusual expression of approval, then Rodin, addressing himself alone, and hardly heeding Madame Rodin or myself, would exclaim in accents of the most solemn admiration: "*Cette chair est toute chaude !*"

Rodin was sixty-six years of age when I joined him, and yet his enthusiasm at the sight of beauty in any form was still as fresh and vigorous as that of a youth at his first initiation. Indeed, I was frequently bewildered by the intensity and apparent immaturity of his outbursts, whenever he was confronted with anything that stirred his artist's soul; and these exhibitions of childlike rapture continued to baffle me, until I realised that it was precisely this capacity to feel as acutely as he did, and to respond freshly and powerfully, in spite of advancing years, to the beauty and harmony of life and art, which constitutes the principal difference between the truly artistic temperament and the temper more slow to move of the ordinary man.

CHAPTER IV

RODIN AS A COLLECTOR

Rodin could neither speak nor understand a word of English, but even in the use of his native tongue he was more forcible than glib. Although he gladly expressed his views on the topics of the day, and did so very well, he was not easily induced to talk a great deal, and was inclined to believe that most people talked too much. "You cannot eat your cake and have it," he would say; and then a moment later he would add: "Human force is a unit that you can spend in a variety of ways. You cannot have profound thoughts if you are talking all day long." His speech was singularly manly, and I soon found to my cost that he was very consciously exercised in keeping it so. As an instance of this it may be interesting to relate my early experiences as his amanuensis. While his hair and beard were being trimmed, singed, scented and brushed by the local village barber of Val Fleury, the morning's correspondence was read, and Rodin would dictate his replies. He did this at great speed, and as I had no knowledge of shorthand, I had to do the best I could to seize the sense of his words in a sort of rapid précis, keeping as far as possible to his own phraseology only when a particularly important

or characteristic passage had to be rendered without modification. I then compiled the letters which he was to sign on his return from Paris in the evening, using more or less my own construction and phraseology in their composition. Thus, when I laid the correspondence before him, there was naturally a good deal in it which he did not recognise as his own. This, however, he did not seem to mind, provided it gave the sense of his original words. Nevertheless, I soon noticed that he was always very anxious to avoid the use of certain words, which, although they sometimes rendered his meaning adequately enough, did not enjoy hospitality in his masculine vocabulary. With an impatient scratch of the pen he would, for instance, always strike out such words as *joli*, *charmant*, *gentil* and *gentillesse*, *vilain*, etc., in any context, saying that they were women's words; and he would substitute his own *beau*, *beauté*, *aimable* and *amabilité* and *laid*, no matter how often they had to be repeated in the same letter. He regarded the latter words as more manly, and more suitable for a masculine comment either on the quality of a work of art or the graciousness of an action. For the same reason he preferred his *très beau* before *superbe* or *ravissant*, or any other of the more common epithets expressive of wholehearted admiration which savour of hyperbole.

Now, although I suppose I may say that I knew French very well in those days, my know-

ledge of the language hardly rose to that level of expertness that would have enabled me to seize instantly the nuances that Rodin disliked, and the consequence was that I had, in the early days, constantly to rewrite letters in order to embody the corrections that he used to make in them. Despite his love of life and his hearty enjoyment of it, there was a deep strain of austerity in Rodin's nature, or rather, perhaps, a certain native distinction that made him shun not only feminine phraseology, but also the vulgar tendency to use superlatives which sooner or later seems to affect all the newspaper-reading populations of Europe.

My writing, too, was at first a source of great sorrow to Rodin. A man in his position in France always has a good deal of correspondence with the various ministries of the Government, as also with public officials abroad. Now it is customary for the Frenchman who has to write ceremonious letters of this kind to use note-paper not only of a special quality, but also of a very special size (*papier ministre*), on which the letter is written in the peculiar ornamental and ceremonial handwriting (*écriture ronde*) which in the last generation used to be taught as a matter of course to every schoolboy and schoolgirl in France, in addition to the ordinary writing in which they prepared their lessons. I, of course, had no knowledge of this peculiar form of hand-writing—a fact that greatly puzzled Rodin—and when, therefore, I had to write on *papier ministre*

to Dujardin-Beaumetz, who was then Sous-Secrétaire d'État des Beaux Arts, to a foreign university to acknowledge an honorary degree, or to any other official person or body, my effort to convert my small hand into a stilted ceremonial script, rather like that used by ledger clerks in England, always made Rodin sigh with grief. "*Encore votre petite écriture coulante !*" he would exclaim, not even recognising the substantial modifications I had effected in my usual handwriting; but he would sign the letter notwithstanding, and turn away abruptly as if he wished to banish it from his memory.

He always complained that he had had far too few opportunities for travel, and constantly held out the hope to Madame Rodin that one day when he was less busy be would show her the world. I believe he did ultimately take her a journey with him, but it was only to see one of the great cathedrals of France.

On one occasion, when we had visitors to lunch, a lady asked him why he laid so much store by travelling, and he gave her this characteristic reply. "To travel," he said, "is to see all kinds of things and aspects of nature, of which at home one had no conception. It enriches one's store of mental pictures (*images*). It is above all necessary for an artist, because it furnishes him with a wealth of new similes, new instances and striking parallels. All poets should travel on that account, because poetry is above all other arts the art of discovering new,

illuminating and vivid similes" (*des comparaisons nouvelles, lumineuses et saisissantes*).

I have already mentioned his unshakable faith in youth and his love for it; but one remark he made about it struck me as being so extraordinarily true and original, that it would be a pity if it were not more generally known and understood. He happened one day to be talking in my presence to a young man who was just beginning to make his way in life, and this is what he said: "Remember, young man, the importance of making friends and of getting on before age overtakes you. I do not say this because age is necessarily devoid of capacity or ability, but because it is a great mistake to underrate the effect on all of us of the beauty and charm of youth. Who knows how many æsthetic motives may not be influencing us in our desire to help a young man! And how much does not the absence of these same motives cause us to feel assistance given to old people as dull and devoid of all spontaneity!"

On this same subject of youth he used to speak very much as Disraeli spoke. He believed that France was suffering from her worship of the old man, and that ultimately she would have to change her policy or else trouble would most surely overtake her. "Even the lesson of the Franco-German War," he declared, "has not cured her of this. In 1870 we sent old men to fight our battles, and the consequence was that the Germans beat us. Bazaine, Macmahon

Frossard and Lebœuf, who were all old people, were opposed by young men like Prince Frederick Charles and the Crown Prince of Prussia. Chanzy, one of our best younger generals, who was most successful, Lebœuf refused to employ; and he was only given an important command, under the Government of National Defence, when it was too late. But war is the game of youth. Alexander and Napoleon were mere boys when they won their greatest victories. To conduct a brilliant campaign it is above all necessary to be able to digest and to sleep well in the most adverse circumstances. This only young men can do, hence the mistake of sending old men to take charge of armies." It would be interesting to know what he thought about the early conduct of the late war.

Although it can hardly be said that Rodin as a man of thirty suffered as a soldier during the Franco-German War—for while it lasted he was only a National Guard—he had had not a few bitter experiences during his lifetime in his various encounters with the older men both of his profession and of official France, and it was doubtless the unhappy recollection of these snubs and rebuffs that made him take the view he did about the influence of aged people in France.

Rodin was a great admirer of classical antiquity, and particularly of the artists of Greece, and at his home in Meudon Val Fleury he had a large number of fine pieces of early Greek sculpture

which he had collected during the latter years of his career. Dealers in antiques used to come to him from all parts of Europe, for they knew that he was an enthusiast and that if he really liked a piece he was prepared to make a sacrifice to obtain it. When speaking about these treasures of a former age, more especially about a very fine young Hercules, of which he was justly proud, his attitude was one of genuine humility. Before these wonderful productions of the ancients, he was no longer a master, but an eager and patient student, and to see him turn them over, stroke and almost fondle them, was to get an insight into the modesty of his nature. "How can people dare to say that the Greek masterpieces are cold!" he was wont to exclaim. "They say that a gallery of Greek sculpture is monotonous. What a vitiated taste this means! It is these people themselves who are lifeless and drab and see their own reflection everywhere!"

There can be no doubt that Rodin's inordinate passion for collecting occasionally led him astray, and that, when they could, dealers did not scruple to cheat him. One of Rodin's intimate friends even went so far as to assure me that the great master had been swindled again and again, and that after his death many of the pieces in his collection would be found to be spurious. How true this remark proved to be, I do not know; but it is common knowledge that a year or two before his death his antiques were valued by experts at over two million francs,

and I, who on one occasion had the privilege to be at his side when he was in the throes of one of the most exciting struggles of his life with a dealer in antiques, cannot say that he lacked either shrewdness or expert knowledge. The incident occurred one evening in the late summer of 1906. The sun had only just set, and Rodin and Madame Rodin, according to their wont, were making preparations to go to bed, when a stranger was announced, who said he wished to show Monsieur Rodin a wonderful old Greek bronze.

The moment Rodin was informed of the visitor's business he became strangely excited. It was obvious that he was childishly susceptible to this kind of lure, and, dismissing the servant with instructions to show the man into the small studio which was across the entrance hall from the dining-room in the Villa des Brillants, and to light a lamp there, he straightway gave up all idea of going to bed.

For some time—about twenty minutes—Rodin remained closeted with the stranger, while Madame Rodin and I sat waiting in the small room adjoining the dining-room, which was used as my *bureau*. Madame Rodin was always anxious and peevish in such circumstances; because, with the frugal and thrifty traditions of the French peasantry in her breast, she could not help being shocked by the prices that Rodin was prepared to pay for any addition to his museum. In her opinion, all dealers were un-

trustworthy and cunning people who knew how to extort the most fabulous sums from her poor Auguste for the merest rubbish; and, as she knew neither the extent of his income nor the value or beauty of the treasures he used to purchase, her distress was perhaps perfectly natural. At all events, on this particular evening, when her arrangements had been so rudely disturbed, she was unusually miserable.

At last we heard the door open, and the stranger taking leave of Rodin, and in a moment the master was with us. He was obviously in a state of great exaltation, and his eyes beamed with triumph. Without a moment's hesitation he turned to me and asked whether I could go to Paris there and then. I replied that if he wished me to do so, I could, of course, go at once. He then invited me to follow him into the small studio, and leading me towards the lamp, showed me the statuette the stranger had left. "You see this," he said; "if it is genuine it is priceless. The man assures me that it is genuine, and I have persuaded him to leave it with me until the morning, so there is no time to be lost. He says he will take eighteen thousand francs for it. It is too little and I am suspicious. As you see, it is most beautiful and almost perfect. But somehow I have a faint recollection that I have seen something so much like it, that it might be a skilful fake—particularly as regards one of the arms, which does not seem to me quite right."

He then proceeded to give me very precise

directions for reaching the street in the Quartier Latin along which I should be likely to find the greatest number of statue and plaster-cast dealers, and bidding me take a good look at the bronze, so as to remember exactly what it was like, and ordering me to buy and to bring back with me anything in plaster that even remotely resembled it, he hurried me off to Paris.

It was about half-past eight, and just as I was going to cross the garden on my way to the station, he called to me from the steps of the villa to make sure that I understood the nature of my mission. "Remember," he said, "that if you see something very like it, do not be put off if one of the arms is raised, or if there is a small staff or something in one of the hands." (I may say that the hands of the bronze held nothing.) "But you will be struck with the likeness before you begin to examine details of that sort."

I saluted and left, and taking the first electric train to Paris, reached the city in time to make my search. The bronze was apparently a small Hermes, about twenty-four inches high; it had no stand, and one of the legs looked as if it had been melted off below the knee. I ran quickly along the street Rodin had directed me to, and scanning the shop-windows of those tradesmen who dealt in plaster casts of all kinds, tried to discover a statuette that was in some way reminiscent of the alleged genuine antique which I had just studied so carefully. As I had

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been warned that the bronze, in addition to being a slightly modified copy of a well-known Hermes, might possibly have been reduced in size, I was obliged to examine large pieces with just as much care as those which conformed in dimension with the suspicious piece, and my search was therefore a little complicated and took some time. At last, however, in a state of acute excitement, I fancied I saw exactly the piece I wanted, and, strange to say, it was so faintly different from the " genuine " antique, that its very size was identical. It was a Hermes with the left hand clasping a staff or scroll, and, as I remembered that the left arm of the bronze had aroused Rodin's suspicions as a sculptor, I dashed into the shop, feeling not a shadow of doubt that I had tracked down the incriminating evidence of the swindle.

I purchased the plaster for a few francs, and, after getting the shopkeeper to wrap it up, I returned to Meudon Val Fleury. Rodin was still up when I returned, although the hour was uncommonly late for him; and I laid my find before him. He nodded his head gravely. Except for the left arm and hand, the plaster was in every respect an exact replica of the alleged antique bronze, and he congratulated me. " You see how careful I have to be !" he exclaimed, smiling sadly. But still he seemed to covet the beautiful bronze, and as it was just possible that we were confronted by an extraordinary and genuine coincidence, and that the

dealer was quite innocent of any wish to deceive, he told me that he had already sent an urgent message to his bronze founders in Paris, so that an expert might examine the figure the following day.

The next morning, after the visit of the expert, who entirely condemned the statuette, the dealer arrived and tried his utmost to question me to discover what had happened. I put him off with vague replies, and as soon as possible took him to Rodin. But the Monsieur Rodin with whom he was now confronted was by no means the same person as the enthusiastic amateur of the previous evening; for, when he was angry, Rodin could not only be offensive but terrible. After the interview I heard a quick step on the gravel outside, and standing up at my writing-table, I managed to catch a glimpse of a hurrying figure, bearing away a bundle that looked like a roll of old velvet. The face of the departing dealer was bloated with indignation, and I gathered that he had had an unpleasant surprise.

If it survived the years, the plaster cast that I bought in Paris must have been found among Rodin's belongings at Meudon after his death, and probably provoked a good deal of curiosity, as its presence in his collection would have been difficult to account for.

Terrible, however, as Rodin could be when annoyed—and who knows this better than his various secretaries, Coquiot, Rilke, and myself ?—his disposition was on the whole humane and

considerate. At all events I did not often have to complain of his temper. Our principal difficulties arose through his fatal habit of relegating important letters to the pockets of his various garments and forgetting that he had put them there when read. Loving order as he did, and insisting upon the most meticulous orderliness in others, this was a strange failing on his part, and often led to the most trying scenes. Thus he would suddenly ask me to produce a letter that I had never seen—one possibly that he had received and read at his studio in the Rue de l'Université days before and had kept entirely to himself—and if I could not produce it, he would immediately fly into the most unreasoning passion, and become so thoroughly offensive that it was often necessary to remember who he was and what he had done, in order not to flee from his presence there and then, never to return. Nevertheless, when, perhaps weeks afterwards, the letter in question would be found either in one of the pockets of his overalls in Paris, or in a discarded jacket or overcoat at Meudon, he was always ready to make amends, although these repeated discoveries never seemed to make him conscious of his regrettable habit. When these scenes occurred Madame Rodin often used to come forward as a comforter, and, to the accompaniment of wild and indignant gesticulations, relate how often in the old days she too had had to endure false accusations of the same kind, when, through no fault of hers, he had mislaid

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or lost one of the tools he used in his modelling. I gather that all his secretaries had to complain of this kind of difficulty in their dealings with him; but, when we remember the volume of his correspondence and the extreme busyness of his life, it is not surprising that occasionally he allowed a letter to go astray.

Throughout my stay with him I also felt that he never quite liked my persistent use of the word *Monsieur* in addressing him. I might say that everybody, except Madame Rodin, always addressed him as *Maître*, and that if in the early days my use of the word *Monsieur* might have been excusable as the result of ignorance, after the first week no such excuse was possible. But somehow I could not get myself to adopt the more ceremonious title. Something in my English upbringing seemed to tell me that in the title *Maître*, used to a man's face every day and at every moment of the day, there was a savour of fulsomeness and excessive compliance which was too suspiciously like what is vulgarly known as "sucking up," and I could not prevail upon myself to employ it. I have often thought since that I was wrong in this, and that I did not sufficiently allow for the difference of point of view between the two nations in this matter. For although no one—least of all Rodin himself—ever told me of it, I cannot help thinking now, that the strangeness of my address, which was the more conspicuous for its uniqueness in his entourage, must have struck him as singular,

if not as deliberately contumacious. And the fact that, despite a deep strain of vanity in his nature, he never reproved me for it—as he once did his own son—rather bears out what I say about his humanity and considerateness.

But I could give other instances of his kindly disposition. I shall never forget, for example, with what horror he once explained to me why a certain coldness had come over his friendship with X., a country doctor. This man, with his wife, had for years been a constant visitor at the Villa des Brillants, and Rodin and Madame Rodin had also been entertained at the doctor's home in the environs of Paris. Now Dr. X. had an old horse, a faithful veteran of a servant, that had drawn his master's ramshackle tilbury about the countryside for years. In its old age, however, this unfortunate animal had developed an infirmity which was at once disfiguring and ludicrous. For some reason that no one could explain it allowed about two or three inches of its tongue to protrude permanently from its mouth, to the intense amusement of all the children and evil-minded wags of the neighbourhood. Now this infirmity, pathetic as it was, in view of the age and record of the poor beast, proved too much for Dr. X.'s patience, for it seemed to draw upon him the scorn which was really only directed at his steed. So one day, after an unusually humiliating experience among the children of a remote village, feeling he could endure it no longer, he seized

one of his surgical knives and amputated the offending excess of tongue at one sweep.

The extraordinary part of this tragedy was that the horse survived the operation with perfect success, and lived to serve its master for years afterwards; not so, however, Monsieur Rodin, who, when he came to hear of it, after noticing the change in the animal's appearance, displayed the utmost horror at his friend's action, and was never able to forgive him for it.

Another instance of the humanity and radical gentleness of Rodin's nature was afforded me quite accidentally one day when I happened to be discussing with him Whistler's *Gentle Art of Making Enemies*. From talking about the book we wandered on to certain familiar stories about the American artist, and Rodin referred to the famous anecdote, known to most people now, about the passage of arms between Oscar Wilde and Whistler, at a certain dinner or lunch table, when Whistler seemed publicly to lend support to the alleged plagiarism of himself by Oscar Wilde. It will be remembered that on the occasion in question Whistler having said something witty, Wilde, after applauding it with enthusiasm, exclaimed that he wished he himself had said it, whereupon Whistler retorted instantly, " But you will, Oscar, you will !"

I laughed as the anecdote was repeated, but Rodin suddenly interrupted me with a gesture; then, looking extremely grave, and speaking with great emphasis and severity, he declared,

"Yes, but remember this, it was Wilde who on that day played the finest part and showed the kinder nature" ("*Oui, mais rappellez-vous d'une chose, c'est Wilde qui ce jour là a joué le plus beau rôle et qui a montré la meilleure nature*"). This side of Whistler's character, like one or two other aspects of the man, was peculiarly distasteful to Rodin, and when I told him what I believed to be still an unpublished anecdote about Whistler at Etaples, he was plainly indignant.

All those who know Etaples will not require to be reminded of a certain inn on the Place du Marché known as l'Hôtel Ioos, the whole of the front lounge or billiard saloon of which, in the old days, was decorated with original paintings given to the proprietor by artists who from time to time had wished to leave him some token of their appreciation of his excellent cuisine and attendance. Now, on one occasion, Whistler, with his eyeglass in action, was slowly walking round this front room, examining the mural decorations, while another artist whom he knew slightly, a Mr. A., was sitting on one of the leather seats watching his movements, when Mr. B., a friend of A.'s, who very much wished to speak to Whistler and make his acquaintance, begged A. to introduce him. Feeling very proud to be able to grant his friend's request, A. replied, "Yes, certainly, come along!" and went straight up to where the American was standing. "Oh, Mr. Whistler," said A. a little nervously, "excuse

me, but this is my friend B." Whistler halted in his slow march round the room, and then, looking back over his shoulder and casting a rapid glance at B., replied, " Oh, indeed, well, it doesn't matter !"

Rodin was very much shocked at this anecdote, and it was in vain that I tried to plead in Whistler's favour. I pointed out how frequently a celebrity like Whistler has to suffer the importunacy of nobodies, who merely wish to gratify their curiosity, and that Rodin himself must be too well aware of this kind of petty persecution to misunderstand Whistler's motives in behaving as he did. " It's all very well," Rodin replied, " but it was unpardonable all the same " (" *C'est égal, c'était tout de même impardonnable* ").

If Rodin thought that Whistler was occasionally inconsiderate, Whistler, on the other hand, as we have already seen, disapproved of much in the great sculptor which was peculiarly offensive to his American taste. For instance, he always maintained in private that Rodin was inclined to be obscene, and had the greatest difficulty in discovering any beauty or grandeur in the sculptor's extraordinary drawings. The latter I shall discuss in a later chapter; but, as regards the charge of obscenity, all that can be said is that if Rodin was not obscene—and I think he was not—he certainly made no effort in this respect to avoid at least the appearance of evil. I had the run of Rodin's house in Meudon Val Fleury. I knew the books he bought

and read, and I knew also the prints and illustrations he collected. I also knew most of what he had produced in sculpture. Now it would be idle to deny that from a rigid public standpoint, some of the books and prints in his possession—particularly some exquisite Japanese drawings of the nude—were what is usually styled pornographic. It would also be inaccurate to state, despite the testimony of various private people who have to my knowledge purchased copies of his more startling creations, that these were, from the public standpoint, in the best of taste. But that Rodin was by nature and disposition obscene I frankly do not believe; for if he had been, this obscenity must inevitably have made itself felt in his private conversation and daily life. Now I doubt whether there is anybody on earth to-day who can say that his alleged obscenity—for Whistler was by no means the only person who accused him of it—ever revealed itself either in his private conversation or his habits. Who can tell now what purpose the pornographic elements in his library actually served? Who can explain the nature of his art impulse when he conceived his least acceptable productions? Is not "pornographic" a relative term in any case? When an earnest student of nature, who is also an artist and profoundly influenced by the pagan world, keeps certain doubtful literature and pictures in his possession, and produces certain questionable sculptures, who is to argue from this that he is obscene?

Does not obscenity imply either some indecent practice or habit, in word or deed ? And can a great work of art ever be indecent ? Is it not possible, moreover, that through long intercourse with the spirit and outlook of antiquity, Rodin acquired an attitude that was, as it were, super-European, or super-social in regard to these matters ? There is certainly such a thing as a second or mature innocence regarding the mysteries of life, which can be acquired through the avenue of æsthetics and a lofty sense of beauty, and which restores to the artist or poet of ripe years the artlessness of the animal or child. And that this innocence sometimes appears very much like indecency we know only too well from our familiarity with infants and our domestic animals.

Now Rodin was certainly a child. All those who came into contact with him are agreed on this point. In a host of ways he showed the fundamental simplicity and artlessness of the mind he had formed in his later years; and on this account alone I doubt whether it would be any more accurate to accuse him of obscenity than it would be to bring a similar charge against a baby or an animal. Perhaps his most questionable work, " l'Iris," or, as he called it among his friends and intimates, " l'Éternel Tunnel," a piece of sculpture which for obvious reasons is not familiar to the general public—presents a difficult problem to the modern apologist or defender of his work, and it took me some time

to understand it. Nevertheless I can quite well see that if the possibility of this supposed "second" innocence is granted, then the difficulty of placing and appreciating "l'Iris" is greatly diminished.

When it is understood that, despite his wealth, he led the life of a workman, that he was incapable of a sophisticated or luxurious taste, that he lived among surroundings in his villa at Meudon which for thorough discomfort and austerity would have startled the serenity out of a mendicant monk; and, moreover, when we know, as we do know, that this existence was but a reflection of his character, and his natural adaptation to his century, it would be unjust not to allow for the possibility that the extreme simplicity of his nature enabled him to take a view of life and human relations which to the modern ordinary member of society must appear odd, if not immoral.

To his dying day he maintained even towards money the attitude of a schoolboy. He had not the faintest idea of what it could buy or what it could do. "Up to the age of fifty," he would often declare, "I suffered all the tortures of poverty (*tous les tourments de la pauvreté*). Money has come to me too late, and we artists do not know how to accustom ourselves to its power." Certainly he did not. But, on the other hand, even if he had known, I do not believe he would have taken any pains to apply his knowledge. Such a man, even when he

shocks us, cannot be judged according to the standards that regulate the life of the ordinary citizen.

Quite apart, however, from the validity or otherwise of this charge of obscenity, there were many among the visitors at Meudon who found difficulty in understanding even so simple a fact about Rodin's work as his habit of representing —or misrepresenting—well-known people in a state of complete nudity. I remember particularly an American lady who, after viewing the plaster model of the Hugo monument, turned to me in perplexity and asked why in the name of goodness Monsieur Rodin had taken a man like poor old Victor Hugo, who had gone to the pains of dressing like a decent and civilised human being all his life, and had divested him of every shred of clothing.

" Tell her," said Rodin, " that I hope the eyes of many generations, besides her own, will one day contemplate this monument. Why, then, should I clothe him to make him look ridiculous in the foolish masculine fashions of his time ? There is nothing more banal than these statues of recent notabilities, to be seen in every big city of Europe, masquerading as tailor's models of their ugly period. Man's naked form, on the other hand, belongs to no particular moment in history; it is eternal, and can be looked upon with joy by the people of all ages."

The American lady objected that the tradition of sculpture hardly upheld Rodin's method; for

every age had clothed its sculptured figures in the dress of the period. Were not all the Roman emperors and heroes represented in the dress of their time ? And were not the kings and knights of the Middle Ages represented in the armour worn by their class ?

" True," Rodin replied. " But the dress of the Roman was universal and for all time, in this sense, that it did not mar the beauty of the human body. This is also true of much of the clothing of the Middle Ages. That is why I did not strip Balzac; because, as you know, his habit of working in a sort of dressing-gown (*houppelande*) gave me the opportunity of putting him into a loose flowing robe that suppelid me with good lines and profiles without dating the statue."

Rodin himself was happiest in the old woollen *houppelande* in which he used to wander about his garden and large studio at Meudon; but the subject of his clothes I must leave to another chapter.

CHAPTER V

RODIN AS A DRAUGHTSMAN

NEVER once did I have an opportunity of meeting Rodin's son, but very soon after taking up my duties at the sculptor's country house I learnt that there was a person who stood in that relation to Monsieur and Madame Rodin, and that it was best not to make any allusion to him. His name was Auguste Beuret—Beuret being Madame Rodin's maiden name—and almost all I knew about him was that Rodin was not particularly fond of him could not suffer him for long at his side, and allowed him to call at Meudon about once a month. How he was smuggled in and out of the grounds without my ever getting a glimpse of him, I do not know; but I was always aware of his having called owing to the excited condition into which his visit always seemed to put his aged mother. When once he had gone she would generally inform me of his visit, and explain how hard it was at times to find the old clothes and the money which constituted his monthly allowance. The place was usually turned topsy-turvy in the search for old boots and cast-off clothing belonging to Monsieur and Madame Rodin; and then, looking very much exhausted, Madame would come sighing into my *bureau* and declare

that " it was all over for this time." I gathered that he was an artist who managed to earn a little, very little, by means of his engravings, that he was getting on in years—that is to say, he was past middle age—and that he was quite uneducated. The quantity of second-hand clothes he seemed to require might possibly have aroused my suspicions if I had troubled to think about it, for obviously the monthly supply could not have been for his own use. But, in any case, I thought it safer not to ask questions, and it was only later on that, to my astonishment, I discovered by accident that he was not merely an engraver, but also a sort of *chiffonnier* (dealer in old clothes), and that he used to eke out his small earnings as an artist by plying this trade—so extraordinary and unexpected for the son of one so famous and eminent.

Madame Rodin did not seem to feel that tremendous tenderness for him which might possibly have caused her to resent Rodin's unnatural aloofness from his offspring; but evidently her devotion to the father was such that it left little room in her heart for any other great and absorbing passion. Thus, although she did not scruple to complain to me often enough of Rodin's difficult temper, and of his incorrigible attachment to the rest of her sex, she never once showed any indignation about his treatment of their only child. Whether Rodin ever made any provision for him in later years I do not know; but since the bulk of the great

sculptor's collected treasures went to the State, it is unlikely that there could have been very much left for Auguste Beuret, although I believe the French Government undertook, at Rodin's death, to make the man a small allowance.

Madame Rodin used to assure me that Rodin made a practice of criticising and correcting their son's artistic work; but the impression I got from her repeated confidences on the point—an impression rather confirmed by the verdict of history—was that Auguste Beuret was not by any means a great or very capable artist, and that he certainly had not inherited any of his father's genius.

Rodin himself never once referred to Auguste Beuret in my presence, although I believe this apparent secrecy was due more to the fact that he was indifferent than to any desire to conceal from me all knowledge of the man's existence. At the time I came across him, moreover, Rodin was on the whole too much self-centred to allow such a circumstance to preoccupy him. Indeed, his absorption in his own concerns was such that he frequently had to be loudly called, as it were from a deep reverie, in order to attend to a remark made by anyone who was habitually about his person, and this was more especially the case when he was feeling low or worried.

Sitting or standing in his garden or large studio at Meudon, sucking the sweets which he always carried about with him, he attended to us who saw him daily only with a certain effort.

Truth to tell, this was largely due not only to self-absorption, but, as I discovered after a time, to a slight affliction, the existence of which he never openly acknowledged. I have said that there was a deep strain of vanity in his nature. Perhaps there is in all of us. But in him it manifested itself, among other ways, in a very pardonable but quite stubborn refusal to admit that he was slightly deaf. Thus I acquired the habit of approaching him rather in the manner of one who wishes to rouse another from sleep.

Regarding his habit of sucking sweets, I became aware of this quite soon after my arrival at Meudon. On my first meeting with him, I was conscious of a curious sweet scent, very faint but distinctly noticeable, which seemed to infect the air about him, and at first I thought that it might be due to some perfume with which Madame Rodin sprinkled his clothes or his handkerchief. This explanation, however, seemed hardly compatible with his character; for, if Rodin was anything at all, he was both in build and in temperament certainly one of the most masculine men I have ever met. It struck me, therefore, that he would never have tolerated any such feminine interference with his toilet, and least of all did it seem possible that Madame Rodin was the kind of woman to suggest or attempt it. At last one day the riddle was solved for me. I happened to be speaking about the habit of smoking tobacco, and remarked that I had never seen Rodin smoke except just after

lunch, when, as I think I have already mentioned, he used, apparently with very little enjoyment, to get through half of a "Boc" cigar. "Oh, I gave up continuous smoking long ago," he observed. "I found it interrupted my work and my thoughts. But when I first tried to do without it I failed most conspicuously. So one day I spoke to a friend about it, and he advised me each time the longing returned to put a small piece of sweetmeat into my mouth and to suck it slowly until it dissolved away." He then produced from one of the deep pockets of his *houppelande* a little metal box full of yellow sweets that looked like barley-sugar drops. "Taste one!" he said: "they are excellent." They were indeed extremely good, and when I asked what they were called he replied that they were a sort of "*Berlingots*" which were sent him, I believe, from Dijon, whence he obtained a constant supply.

His slight deafness, which, as far as I can discover, seems to have been noticed by only very few of the people who met him, may have accounted for his extraordinary inability to pronounce foreign names. This is a common infirmity among Frenchmen; but in Rodin it was present in a form so acute that one was led to suspect that he helped out his imperfect hearing by trying in private to learn the pronunciation of foreign names phonetically from the spelling of them—obviously a fatal thing to do, particularly when they were English. Thus quite early in my life at the Villa des Brillants, Rodin and

I were brought almost to the brink of our first quarrel, because, owing to the fact that I was not yet sufficiently familiar with the work he had on hand, or with his circle of admirers and supporters, I was quite unable to guess to whom he referred when he asked me about certain people. The scene occurred at lunch, at which meal, if we were alone, Rodin would often like to question me both about England and the English notabilities whom he had come across. Imagine, therefore, my bewilderment when I was suddenly requested to give particulars about a person called *Ovardevaldant* (pronounced as a Frenchman without any knowledge of English phonetics would pronounce these syllables). Naturally I asked him to be good enough to repeat the name, and stared blankly when it came out in exactly the same incomprehensible way. Not a glimmer of intelligence could possibly have brightened my staring eyes. I did not even know the sex of the creature whose identity I was expected to discuss. Consternation seized me, and I grew horribly embarrassed. "But, young man, you are not going to make me believe that you have never heard of *Ovardevaldant!*" he cried, quickly losing all patience. ("*Mais vous n'allez pas me faire croire, jeune homme, que vous n'avez jamais entendu parler de Ovardevaldant!*") Perhaps if I had not been so over-anxious to please, and if, moreover, I had not been so hard pressed, I might quickly have guessed what he meant. But with a man of Rodin's nature and eminence,

growing every second more and more dumbfounded and impatient, and with Madame Rodin looking imploringly at me across the table, begging me with her eyes not to upset her great lord's temper or digestion, if I could possibly refrain from doing so, I confess that my mind became a complete blank, and I had at last to make the humiliating and damaging admission that I had never in my life heard of such a person.

"Oh, that's too much!" ("*Oh, ça c'est trop fort!*") cried Rodin, beside himself with grieved astonishment, and turning to Madame Rodin he shrugged his shoulders, as if he was obliged to confess that after all his cherished hopes about me, I was proving myself absolutely worthless.

At last, by slow degrees I elicited the following crumbs of information. As, however, they were flung at me by a man who had completely lost all patience, I was, of course, slower than I should otherwise have been in piecing them together. "*Ovardevaldant*" was a "*grand siegneur*"; he was "*extrêmement aisé*"; he was the head of a very famous English family, had recently had his portrait bust executed by Rodin, and was, in fact, "*un lord*"—"*Lorrovardevaldant!*" At last I knew what he meant, and amid profuse apologies assured him that I had indeed heard of Lord Howard de Walden, and that his name was a very familiar one in England. "*A la bonheur enfin!*" he cried, looking very red and angry. But it was, of course, impossible to explain why I had not immediately recognised

the name, and the only course open to me was to try to live down the infamy I had incurred by this little contretemps. Whether I ever succeeded in doing this I do not know—first impressions are most difficult to overlay or to eradicate—and when a day or two later a similar though less painful scene occurred over a certain Monsieur " Bernarre Chuv," I am afraid I only confirmed what was then becoming a rooted conviction in Rodin's mind, that for one who pretended to be able to fill the post of private secretary I was singularly ill-informed.

As to Mr. Bernard Shaw, I must acknowledge incidentally that I was very much puzzled by one or two things that Rodin said about him. At that time I had not yet seen Mr. Shaw either in England or anywhere else, but from photographs I had a fairly good idea of what he looked like. Now, without wishing to cast any unflattering aspersions upon his appearance, I had, rightly or wrongly, always been under the impression that in his features there was something sardonic, and, particularly when he smiled, more than a faint suspicion of malice and irony, which harmonised well with the relentless and witty criticism of modernity that characterised his various works. Apparently, however, all this side of Mr. Shaw had escaped Rodin so completely that the great sculptor, who was as I gathered at that time more or less ignorant of Mr. Shaw's literary and dramatic productions, seemed to me to have misunderstood the famous

Irishman's nature. Having seen a good deal of him shortly before I appeared on the scene, Rodin was naturally inclined to talk about him, and I fancy I remember having understood that I occupied the same place at the dining-table which, not so very long before my arrival, had been taken by Mr. Shaw himself for some meal or meals that he had had at the Villa des Brillants. In this, however, I may be wrong. At all events, I got the impression that both Monsieur and Madame Rodin had had ample opportunity of seeing Mr. Shaw in a relaxed and sociable mood, away from the formal sittings that had been necessary for the bust. I was all the more surprised, therefore, to hear Rodin expatiate at great length and quite seriously upon the "Christ-like" mould and appearance of Mr. Shaw's head and features! On hearing the great sculptor state this view for the first time I showed very natural but discreet surprise; but Rodin refused to yield an inch. "*Une vraie tête de Christ*," he reiterated, obviously delighted with his recollection of it; and Madame Rodin concurred most emphatically.

Those who know Rodin's bust of Mr. Shaw will now perhaps be able to account for a certain unfamiliar meekness, gravity and absence of Shavian "roguishness," which have crept into the sculptor's interpretation of the author of *Plays Pleasant and Unpleasant*, which otherwise are hard to explain. At all events my personal view has always been that the bust of Mr. Bernard

Shaw is one of the least successful of Rodin's portrait sculptures, and those who share this feeling may therefore be interested to hear how Rodin summed up the general impression that Mr. Shaw made upon him.

Rodin had paid, I believe, only two short visits to England when I first saw him, and he was therefore only imperfectly acquainted both with our customs and our point of view. He had, however, retained a vivid recollection of English food, most of which he condemned without mercy, although in regard to one dish his praise was unbounded, and he frequently twitted Madame Rodin for being unable to give it to him. This was boiled leg of mutton and caper sauce. On the whole he was inclined to argue quite rightly that what a man likes in food depends very largely on what he has been used to. But boiled leg of mutton and caper sauce, he was prepared to concede, constituted an exception to this rule, at least as far as he was concerned.

Limited as was his knowledge of England, however, he had very definite views about English women and their beauty, and whenever he possibly could he preferred to employ English female models. "No women," he declared, "have such fine legs as the well-built English girl." During my stay with him he frequently employed English girls as models, and I believe it was an English girl who originally posed for his "Eve"; but of this I am not sure. Incidentally

I may say that it was in reference to this fine statue, and the model who posed for it, that Rodin warned me so solemnly when I first joined him. "Understand," he said, "that you must never have anything to do with my models. You may occasionally have to pay them for me, or fix their hours, but beyond these business relations I wish you to have no conversation with them whatever." I promised solemnly that I would do as he said; then, leading me up to the "Eve," he continued, "You see that statue: I was particularly pleased with it as a conception. The model, too, was exceptionally fine. She had a magnificent figure, and I was never able to replace her. But you notice how sketchy some of that modelling is round the top of the hip and groin." (I confess I had not noticed anything of the sort, and was quite unable to perceive what he meant even after he had pointed it out to me.) "Well," he continued, "that is not my fault. Owing to the ridiculous folly of a young man who became associated with that model, I lost her before my "Eve" was finished—before, that is to say, I had sufficiently studied that particular part of my sculpture; and that is the consequence. The young man in question allowed himself to become intimate with her, and she had a child. Now you understand why I am so severe on this point. I have had my lesson."

It was, I think, in September or October, 1906, that I first conceived the absurd notion of talking

to Rodin about his clothes, and I doubt whether I ever perpetrated a greater error in my life. As I have already shown, and shall doubtless show again, he was by nature exceedingly naive; that is why, possibly, he was frequently so easily led by strangers who did not mean altogether well by him. One had only to be frank and to make a bold criticism of his work, or anything else that he had done or said, and he always showed extraordinary tolerance and even eagerness in hearing one out. Knowing this about him, I never scrupled to speak out my mind, although once, in an evil moment—I cannot for the life of me say what drove me to it—I made the mistake of criticising his French tailor and of suggesting alterations in his wardrobe. As usual he listened patiently without the smallest sign of vexation, and, at the end of my remarks, smiled very affably and declared that he placed himself unreservedly in my hands and would do whatever I suggested. All I said was that for a man in his position I thought he might wear clothes of a smarter cut, and that, if he agreed with me, I could introduce him to an English tailor who would be prepared to dress him quite *à l'anglaise*. Alas, even these few words proved to be far too many! I recommended him to an expensive English tailor quite close to the Opera in Paris, and unfortunately my influence ended there. If only he had done what he said he would do, and placed himself entirely in my hands, it would have been all right. But he did

not. When once he had accepted my advice about the tailor, and instructed me to summon the man to Meudon, he insisted on directing the future course of events himself, and the consequence was that, in the end, my advice was utterly discredited. I quite forgot that the average Frenchman's idea of English male clothing is limited to the variety of heavy tweeds and cheviots which he sees the English tourist wearing about Paris and elsewhere. And as Rodin was very heavy, almost clumsy, in build, and, in order to look smartly attired, would have required dark suitings of the very lightest possible weight for the season of the year, it was, of course, fatal to let him have a free run among the patterns of an English tailor's shop. The result may be imagined! He chose materials that would have destroyed the grace of an Apollo. The smart English cut which the tailors gave him only succeeded in accentuating the clumsiness of his feet, his hands and his massive head, without making him feel natural or at ease, as his French clothes had done. He wore these English clothes, moreover, unconvinced of their superiority over the clothes he had discarded, and they harmonised atrociously with his old collars and ties, the style of which he had refused to alter. The consequence was that in a month or so I had the mortifying experience of hearing from his own lips every possible kind of adverse criticism made by his friends both against the tailor I had recommended and the general change in his

appearance, for which I had been chiefly responsible, and there was nothing to do but to urge him at the earliest possible opportunity to get back into his French attire. I shall never forget the shock I had when I first saw him in a dark, heavy morning suit, with a square-cut morning coat, rather like that worn by yeomen or farmers at a village festival in England, trying his utmost to look and feel happy. It was an agonising moment. Even Madame Rodin, who did not pretend to have an eye for such things, felt there was something wrong, and if we had spoken the truth, all three of us would have confessed, before the outside world had had time to give its verdict, that the old, badly cut French clothes were much the best.

Thus, for all practical purposes, Rodin's prepossessions in favour of England and her productions were limited to the English female figure and to boiled leg of mutton and caper sauce. This last attempt at cultivating in him a taste for a third aspect of British life proved completely disastrous.

I think I have shown that he was both childish and naive; but he also possessed the one virtue which above all others forms the best counterpart to these qualities. He was extremely cautious. The incident of the Greek bronze rather proves this; but what proves it even more were his precautions against fire at Meudon. He had an unusual dread of fire, and the isolated position of his country house and

large studio, on the top of the hill overlooking Issy-les-Moulineaux, caused him to devise all kinds of safeguards against the danger of being burned down. Quite close to the Villa des Brillants, for instance, on the side facing Sèvres, and between the villa and the studio, there was, in my time, a large basin built of cement and fed from the main, which was always filled with water; and this large pool, which was about fifteen feet in diameter, had been specially constructed to furnish the first supplies of water in case of fire. Another basin had been built lower down in the garden, between the studio and my cottage; and all lamps, either in the villa itself or in my small annexe, were filled with an oil which, although it burned fairly brightly at the wick, would not ignite quickly if spilled on the ground. I don't know whether colza possesses this convenient property, but I fancy that this was the name it went by at the villa, and with it the lamps gave a tolerable though none too brilliant light.

Perhaps Rodin's habitual caution appeared to less advantage in the matter of equipping himself with a horse and carriage than it did in other concerns of his life; but here the extreme novelty of his undertaking may possibly have disturbed his normal line of conduct. The project was discussed with Madame Rodin and myself at various meals, some time before it was actually executed, and when at last it was matured, I think I succeeded in preventing him from acting

too rashly, by reminding him of the many pitfalls that awaited the mere amateur if he tried to measure his wits against those of the average horse-dealer. Rodin had often expressed his repugnance to motor-cars, and yet felt urgently in need of some conveyance by means of which he and Madame Rodin might, without too much effort, be able to enjoy the early morning air and the scenery around Meudon. Of course, the idea of a horse and carriage of their own completely took Madame Rodin's breath away, particularly as she thought immediately about the domestic aspects of it—the coachman, his food and his sleeping accommodation. At last, however, all three of us grew accustomed to the idea, and Rodin having succeeded through a friend in getting upon the track of an old and experienced coachman and a second-hand victoria in good condition, he startled us one day by announcing his intention of buying a horse. I ventured to ask him how he proposed to set about doing this, and to my great surprise he replied that he would simply go to one of the more reputable horse-dealers and buy the first carriage horse that took his fancy. I did my best to explain to him what I conceived to be the danger of this procedure, and implored him very earnestly to take expert and independent advice.

After the incident of the English-cut clothes, he was perhaps a little less inclined than he might otherwise have been to accept my suggestion; nevertheless he listened as usual with

great patience and attention, and when I had finished all I had to say, he smiled and sat for some moments in thoughtful silence. "Yes," he said at last, "perhaps you are right. We had better get someone who understands these matters. Will you please see about it?" I said that I would, but as I had never in my life been engaged on a similar quest, and had no experience in the buying of horses, I confess that I felt for the moment a little nonplussed. "*Eh bien, jeune homme, que comptez-vous faire?*" he enquired after a while. I stammered words to the effect that I would turn it over in my mind, and that very day began making enquiries in the district. The consensus of opinion among the people I consulted seemed to be that the best man for the work was a certain well-known veterinary surgeon who resided at Clamart, a little place a few kilometres south-east of Meudon. He appeared to be altogether *un homme de confiance*, and to him I repaired with my difficulty. He agreed for a small fee to give Monsieur Rodin the best possible advice, and asked me to make an appointment with the Maître at X.'s, the Paris horse-dealers. This I did, and, as luck would have it—for, as I have shown, I had not been particularly happy theretofore in my efforts to assist Rodin outside the ordinary routine of my secretarial duties—this arrangement proved entirely successful. A good sound horse was purchased, quiet and steady, and, as far as I can remember, only a moderate

price was paid for it. At all events it performed the duties Rodin expected of it eminently well, and when I left Meudon, both the coachman and his steed were still giving entire satisfaction. As I have already pointed out, I believe, this horse was not only a draught-animal at Meudon, but also an artist's model; as, however, this brings me to the question of Rodin's drawings, which I intend to discuss a little later on, I shall not dwell on that side of its functions.

Regularly every morning, when the weather was fine, Rodin was now able to take Madame Rodin for a long country drive, and they usually started out between half-past six and seven, and returned about nine. Rodin expressed himself thoroughly delighted with this new plaything, and his health and looks certainly improved from the day it became part of the establishment at Meudon. The ingenuousness with which he wished to set about buying the animal, however, if not characteristic of his customary prudence, was at least in keeping with the naïveté of his nature, and I thought it worth while to describe the episode as an instance of that side of his character which, throughout his later years, made him such an easy prey to all those who seriously conspired to influence him for their own venal ends.

The childish naïveté of the great artist was perhaps never displayed to better advantage than on the occasion of King Sisowath's visit to Paris with his seventy native dancers and

musicians. It was at the time of the Colonial Exhibition at Marseilles, and this monarch of Cambodia had come with his suite and extensive harem to visit the President of the French Republic. He arrived at Marseilles on June 11, 1906, and came to Paris on the 18th, his harem of dancers following him to the capital on July 1. I believe King Sisowath gave a first display of his royal ballet at the Elysée on July 5, but certainly on the evening of the 10th they performed at the *théâtre de verdure* in the Bois de Boulogne, in honour of the Colonial Minister, M. Georges Leygues, and his guests; and it was to this entertainment that Rodin was invited.

I did not see him when he returned that night, but on the following morning he spoke most enthusiastically of the Cambodians, and gave Madame Rodin and myself a glowing description of all they had done. King Sisowath's *corps de ballet*, which had performed under the direction of the King's eldest daughter, Princess Samphoudry, in dances that were at once religious and dramatic, had thoroughly enchanted Rodin, and he compared them with our own modern professional dancers at the Opera and elsewhere, very much to the latter's disadvantage. He was particularly struck with the manner in which he declared they created the impression of growing on the stage in their hieratic and rhythmic evolutions, a feat impossible to our toe-dancers, who reach their utmost height at one spring. He also greatly

extolled a peculiar serpentine movement of their hands and arms, which they caused to pass like an undulating shudder from the tips of the fingers of one hand, up the arms, and across the shoulder-blades on to the finger tips of the other hand. He declared that he had learnt movements of the human body which he had not suspected theretofore, and which the ancients had either not known or failed to record; and he pronounced the art of the whole display as more consummate than anything he had ever seen. "Look," he said, "at that King and at his eldest daughter who directs the *corps de ballet!* They seem from their features to be wicked people (*à juger de leur traits, on dirait qu'ils sont méchants*), but how false and delusive our standards must be, if that is the impression they make upon us! Because they are obviously great artists, and without them all this marvellous beauty would vanish."

When it became known that the Cambodian dancers and their King were to leave Paris for the Villa des Glycines at Marseilles, Rodin in great excitement followed them thither like an enthusiastic child, and there he drew a portrait of King Sisowath, and also made a number of careful drawings of the members of the *corps de ballet.* Returning to Meudon three days later he was so thoroughly exhilarated by his experience that he could hardly speak of anything else. These drawings of the Cambodians must still be in existence somewhere; but, like the

rest of Rodin's drawings, they give the spectator but a poor idea both of the models who stood for them, and of the artist who executed them. By saying this I have no doubt I shall cause a good deal of surprise, if not indignation, among those who are inclined to regard as sacrosanct everything, however trifling, that proceeds from the hand of a great master; but I have the very best authority for writing what I now propose to write concerning the significance of Rodin's drawings, and that is Rodin's own account to me of what they meant in the *ensemble* of his creative activity.

Much has been written, and much more has been said about Rodin's drawings which, judged from the standpoint of the criticism that the best critics have applied to Rodin's sculpture, is hardly worth considering. Nevertheless, thanks to the misguided efforts of enthusiasts, there gradually arose a sort of cult in connection with Rodin's drawings which, I venture to suggest, was as much a surprise to some of his less catholic supporters as it was to the artist himself. Precisely how this cult arose it would take too long to tell. Rodin, however—let it be said quite frankly—was not sufficiently alert or self-conscious to perceive the whole meaning of what took place. Baffled though he was at first by the sudden vogue for his drawings, he ultimately bowed his head in resignation before the storm of applause that grew ever louder about him, and accepting the verdict of the very experts

who had made his greater work intelligible to the world, he, too, slowly became convinced of the enormous artistic importance of this more trivial side of his productive genius. This complete transformation of Rodin's attitude towards his drawings, however, only took place some time after I had left him. When I was with him, he was still in the state of one whose mind had not yet been inflamed by the cult, and he spoke about his drawings to me in terms so plain and frank, that there was no mistaking the very small value he attached to them. I do not mean by this that he affected a carelessness about them which he did not really feel, or that this view of his drawings was of a piece with his generally modest attitude towards his greater works, and that I was therefore deceived; for although Rodin was certainly modest, he had had too great a struggle not to be aware of what was new and inimitable in his masterpieces. I mean that, knowing him as I did, and being in a position to note the difference between his attitude to his sculpture and his attitude to his drawings, I formed the opinion that he regarded his drawings as of no importance whatsoever, except as a means to an end. He placed them where they belong—that is to say, among the exercises by which he retained the accuracy of his vision for the human form, *not among his artistic productions*. What scales are to the executant musician, so were Rodin's drawings to him, no more and no less, and the fact that they happened

to constitute convenient vehicles for his autograph when some unpretentious friend wished to be given a small souvenir, never—at least in my time—modified this view of them in his own mind.

I had several talks with him about his drawings, and was given one particularly enlightening explanation of them, when I happened on a certain occasion to come up behind him while a favourite model was posing for him. I noticed that he kept his eyes fixed on the model, and never looked down at his pencil, or at the paper on which he was drawing. This was the first thing that struck me, and, as I had lived among artists all my life and had done no small amount of drawing myself, the novelty of the method naturally provoked my curiosity. I was reminded instantly of those books which used to be produced at evening parties in most English homes some twenty years ago, in which one was expected to draw a pig with one's eyes shut, and I could not help wondering whether Rodin himself, although he was not blindfolded, had the same shock of surprise as we blinded draughtsmen used to have when at last he turned his eyes down to his drawing and saw what his pencil had described. The next thing I noticed was that he seemed under some obligation not to lift his pencil from the paper, after having once begun to draw—another feature which his drawing had in common with the parlour entertainment already referred to—and that he

always tried to complete his outline of the figure he was drawing in one wavy and continuous sweep. I watched him for some minutes while sheet after sheet was torn away and dropped like rubbish on the floor at his side. Each sheet was covered with one of his characteristic drawings, and each drawing revealed the same kind of mistake or inaccuracy in its final strokes which I recollected had been peculiar to the blindfold drawings of pigs. For instance, the final stroke of, say, the right side of a leg, would be brought down so very far wide of the stroke representing the left side, that the creature drawn looked as if she had elephantiasis. (Those who remember the pig drawings will not need to be told that this kind of fault was a common and recurrent feature of them, and followed inevitably from the method adopted in their production.) People familiar with Rodin's drawings will know at once what I mean, while the uninitiated will now probably be in a position to account for much which, otherwise, must have seemed to them both mysterious and grotesque in Rodin's style of draughtsmanship. Of course, if these kind of strokes were too glaringly wrong, it frequently happened that the drawing was either destroyed or subsequently corrected; but in most drawings that I have seen, the technique of their production—the absence of the guiding eye—is apparent to any careful observer.

Very naturally I was sufficiently intrigued to ask Rodin to explain why he adopted this extra-

ordinary method; for it struck me that if the drawings were full of such glaring inaccuracies—inaccuracies that could not be helped and which followed naturally from the way in which they were produced—they could hardly serve the purpose of documents for his sculptures. Of course, ignorant critics have repeated time and again that they did serve as supplementary documentation for the modelling of his sculptures. But it is obvious that they could not have done so, for they were quite unreliable, and Rodin himself would have been the first to admit it. At all events it was very soon quite plain to me not only that they were never intended as works of art, but that to exhibit them to the public as such was a piece of transparent æsthetic snobbism; and I am glad to find that in this view I am supported by one of Rodin's most able critics and most devoted friends.

As an instance of the hasty and careless criticism responsible for the great vogue enjoyed by Rodin's drawings, a writer in *l'Illustration* declared, when Rodin began drawing the Cambodian women, that very soon we might reasonably expect a sculpture from Rodin representing one of King Sisowath's dancers. But I wonder what this critic thought when no such sculpture ever came to hand? And how could it, seeing that the drawings of the Cambodians were never intended by Rodin as documentation for any sculpture which he had in view? Rodin was much too conscientious to set to work without

a model. And if he ever produced a statuette of a Cambodian dancer—I know of none, though, of course, it may exist—he would only have executed the work with the help of the living model.

But let me now report what Rodin himself told me about his drawings; for this is the best justification of all that I have said. Being aware of my connection with the art world, and familiar also with my own attempts at draughtsmanship, he naturally did not regard my questions as the outcome of idle curiosity. He saw at once that there was something in what I had just witnessed that required explanation, and that I was reasonably puzzled. He therefore replied to my questions very fully, and this is what he said:

"Don't you see that, for my work of modelling, I have not only to possess a very complete *knowledge* of the human form, but also a deep *feeling* for every aspect of it? I have, as it were, to *incorporate* the lines of the human body, and they must become part of myself, deeply seated in my instincts. I must become permeated with the secrets of all its contours, all the masses that it presents to the eye. I must feel them at the end of my fingers. All this must flow naturally from my eye to my hand. Only then can I be certain that I understand. Now look! What is this drawing? Not once in describing the shape of that mass did I shift my eyes from the model. Why? Because I wanted to be

sure that nothing evaded my grasp of it. Not a thought about the technical problem of representing it on paper could be allowed to arrest the flow of my feelings about it, from my eye to my hand. The moment I drop my eyes that flow stops. That is why my drawings are only my way of testing myself. They are my way of proving to myself how far this incorporation of the subtle secrets of the human form has taken place within me. I try to see the figure as a mass, as volume. It is this voluminousness that I try to understand. That is why, as you see, I sometimes wash a tint over my drawings. This completes the impression of massiveness, and helps me to ascertain how far I have succeeded in grasping the movement as a mass. Occasionally I get effects that are quite interesting, positions that are suggestive and stimulating; but that is by the way. My object is to test to what extent my hands already feel what my eyes see."

I have said that what scales are to the executant musician, so were Rodin's drawings to him. I think his explanation of their purpose and purport supports this conclusion. To describe how the vogue for his drawings, as works of art, arose, would take too long, although it would supply a solution of a problem which is otherwise hard to clear up. But, at all events, this much remains perfectly plain, that the value and importance of Rodin's drawings as artistic productions has been grossly exaggerated both by

his friends and the public; and I feel sure that had he been by nature more alert and not quite so artless, he would have been the first to correct the well-meaning people who are responsible for the vogue that these drawings have enjoyed of recent years. In any case he would have prevented these productions from being placed on view in any public exhibition; for, at least in regard to the work of other men, no artist knew better than Rodin how docile and uncritical the modern world is in its acceptance of work of doubtful artistic merit, when once the author of that work has become an eminent public figure.

Some people—and I believe Whistler was among them—stalwartly refused until the end to admit that there was anything artistically admirable in Rodin's drawings; and in his heart of hearts Rodin was in far deeper sympathy with this group of critics than with those who shamelessly extolled these mere tests of his manu-visual harmony, to his very face. Thus, although the possessor of a few Rodin drawings is a proud man to-day, the things that will live and be for ever admired in Rodin's work, are not his pencil exercises, but his sculptures. In this department he was not only an innovator, but a creative revolutionary of prodigious power; and the fact that he created no school, and that he has been followed by no imitators, is the best proof of his genius.

CHAPTER VI

RODIN THE SCULPTOR

I HAVE said that the best proof of Rodin's genius lies in the fact that he has left behind him no school and no imitators, and I think that, on examination, this will be found to be fairly conclusive. For Rodin had a great vogue and his works were widely known. Orders for replicas of his various sculptures used to reach him from all corners of the earth, and there were few people of his generation who could truthfully say that they had not seen his work or heard of it. He was also an artist of very marked mannerisms, and some of the peculiarities of his technique were superficially obvious to the most careless observer. These very mannerisms might easily have been copied—indeed, they were copied. All innovations which are merely technical invariably lead to imitation, particularly when they are associated with successful artistic production. And yet, in spite of all this, the fact remains that he has left behind him no school and no imitators. Those who, seeing only the obvious novelties in the treatment of his surfaces, fancied that his efforts depended solely upon such tricks, were sadly deceived, and soon found to their cost that the "something more," which Rodin's work contained, completely eluded them.

Even the least initiated among the lay public are aware that in every great work of art it is precisely this "something more," the quality that transcends the scope of painstaking labour and technical study, that defies imitation; and, when we have discovered this inimitable quality, we have placed our finger on the one property a great work possesses which raises it to the rank of a genial production. It is for this reason that much modern art-criticism is so misleading, for by concentrating almost entirely upon technical questions, or qualities that are easily imitable, in discussing a work of art, it assumes from the start that an artistic production, however great and unique, is, after all, no more than the result of a skilful and dexterous manipulation of a medium.

It is a traditional, and, to some extent, legitimate practice among art experts to discover a derivation of every artist they discuss. Just as the grammarian is best able to place a word and to give it its proper value when he has found its etymology, so the art expert feels that he is more readily understood, and is more scientific in his description of an artist, when he has shown that artist's line of descent, or necessary historical antecedents. The common objection to this method is that the artist as genius has no descent. This, however, can hardly be true. There is no such thing in life as a phenomenon freed from causation; and when we are tempted to conclude that something has appeared as if

by accident, we only confess our ignorance of the true cause of its appearance. Of course, the method of derivation in art, like most other attempts at classification, has been grossly overdone; and we have seen writers on the history of art arbitrarily forging continuous chains of schools and styles, in which every link was too perfectly fitted into its fellow to escape altogether the suspicion of having been violently or arbitrarily handled. Nevertheless, if we wish nowadays to understand a man, we must picture him as the child of his age, and therefore as more or less the epitome of his forerunners; and since it is probably true that tradition and environment merely pick out in every man those qualities in him which are readily susceptible to stimulation, if we find an artist in a particular century displaying certain characteristics known before his time, we merely facilitate our task of classification if we connect him with the characteristics he recalls. For instance, while it would be absurd, and not at all helpful, to derive Michael Angelo from the sculptors of the Maya civilisation, who were unknown to him, it would be legitimate to connect him with the Greek and Roman, whose influence, both on hereditary and environmental grounds, we may rightly suspect him of having undergone.

Rodin, therefore, with the Greek, Roman, Gothic, and Renaissance sculptors at his back, cannot be entirely independent of his predecessors. He cannot have "fallen from the

blue"; and seeing that he hailed from a northern province of France, that he was a profound student of his artistic forbears, and that he has many points of agreement with them, a derivation in his case is not only possible, but plainly indicated.

He was, as we have seen, an ardent and very humble admirer of the sculpture of classical antiquity. He studied not only Greek art, but also Greek history and literature with the utmost care. He was, moreover, never tired of manipulating the fragments of Greek sculpture which he had collected in his museum; and to Rodin, manipulating meant learning. He was also an earnest and enthusiastic admirer of the Gothic. He constantly extolled the marvels that are to be seen among the sculptures adorning France's Gothic cathedrals, and about these very sculptures he has written most illuminatingly. Donatello, Verrocchio and Michael Angelo were also in a sense his educators, and he frequently referred to them in discussing the problems of his art. He was not bigoted in his devotion to any period or any school. His wholehearted admiration of one style did not lead him to reject or belittle another; and from his conversation, therefore, it was difficult to judge where his heart lay. But that he could not fail to be to some extent the child of the predecessors he studied so carefully, is fairly clear; and if we can succeed in connecting him specially with one or the other of them, we shall simplify our task of explanation.

Briefly stated, the evolution of sculpture from the ancient Egyptians, *via* the Greeks, to our own time, has revealed, except for periods of decline, an ever-increasing fluidity and nervousness of form. Taking the human body as the principal vehicle of expression in the sculptor's art, what we see in the history of sculpture from Egypt 4000 B.C. to Paris A.D. 1900 is a progressive looseness and flaccidness in the body and its pose, accompanied by increasing movement. As the periods go by, rigidity and perhaps vigour gradually diminish, until with Donatello a more delicate and supple form is attained. It is as if Christian civilisation had multiplied and rarefied the gifts of the artist, just as it has complicated and rarefied the soul of humanity, and enabled man as a whole to see certain things more sympathetically and less simply.

Rodin understood all this. That is why he pronounced Michael Angelo more Christian than Greek. He saw the Gothic in the great Renaissance artist, just as he saw it in Donatello; and he refused to accept the facile explanation of the appearance of these artists as merely a resurrection of pagan rationalism and a victory over the mysticism of the Middle Ages.

To say which way Rodin himself leant has constituted the problem of most of the criticism he has provoked, and it is an extremely difficult matter to decide. Some people, thinking of his "Age d'Airain" and his "Balzac," class him

with the Greeks; others, remembering only his "Bourgeois de Calais," regard him as wholly Gothic.

My own view is that, although he aspired to the Greek classicism of Pheidias in many of his pieces, his natural vein lay in the direction of the Gothic. The Greek sculptures are essentially statuesque. Even in their friezes, metopes and pediments they never become picturesque or homely. But, except in very few pieces, Rodin, as Whistler once declared, was not statuesque. Even when he was commissioned to execute a statue of Eustache de Saint Pierre, he proceeded to compose a group instead of a single figure, and even lost money over the affair by delivering a sculpture consisting of six figures instead of one. Subsequently he accounted for this by saying that he thought it unfair to glorify Eustache de Saint Pierre alone and to forget his five companions who had shared the sacrifice imposed by Edward III. But the artistic reason for his peculiar manner of executing the commission was undoubtedly that he did not feel sculpture statuesquely. The group of the "Burghers of Calais" is more picturesque than monumental, more Gothic than Greek, and the historical and other reasons which Rodin gave for conceiving the sculpture in a group ought to be taken with a pinch of salt. When it is remembered that he never intended them to be placed on a pedestal, as they stand in Calais to-day, but on the very stones of the *place* before

Giraudon, Paris.

THE BURGHERS OF CALAIS

The "Eve" can be seen at the back on the extreme left.

the Town Hall, so that they might almost be jostled by the people of Calais as they went about their business in the town, this point seems to be proved.

Rodin worked as a Gothic artist. He would have been happiest decorating a cathedral. And, indeed, almost all his pieces are portions of a grand architectural conception known as "La Porte de l'Enfer." Although he was constantly emphasising the importance of viewing his work in the open air, it is not, therefore, surprising to find many of his sculptures deliberately protected on one side by a wall or background of stone or marble, or else not completely emerged from the boulder out of which they are carved. Such pieces as "Eternal Spring," "The Tempest," "Pygmalion and Galatea," "Victor Hugo," "La Pensée," "Illusion," "The Hand of God," "Orpheus and Eurydice," "The Broken Lily," "Mother and Babe," "Paola and Francesca," are examples of this. It might be argued that the very subjects chosen for some of these pieces called for the treatment Rodin has given them. In "The Hand of God," in which Adam and Eve appear to be forming out of a mass of earth, the treatment is dictated by the subject. But we must remember that certain subjects recommend themselves more or less to particular artists, and my contention would be that it was the essentially Gothic character of Rodin's genius that inclined him to choose such subjects.

But even in those of his works where the figure or figures are as completely disengaged from the rough portions of stone or marble as is compatible with steadiness and adequate support, such pieces as " L'Age d'Airain," " St. John the Baptist," the " Burghers of Calais " and the " Balzac," there is a movement, a swing, a freedom which is more Gothic than classic; for those men of the Renaissance who exhibit these qualities were, according to Rodin's own showing, and in spite of their preoccupation with classical antiquity, largely influenced by Gothic tradition.

Those of us who have visited Nuremberg, and seen the staggering beauty of the mediæval sculptures in the Museum there, will understand immediately when it is said that in such sculpture there is an intensity of animation and expression, a restlessness of form and line, which is never encountered in the Greek or Roman. These qualities are Gothic. They represent part of the accretion to man's grasp of life and nature for which the soul-searching creed of Christianity is responsible. They can be seen in a less obvious form in the restless arches, buttresses, gargoyles, and the daring heights of the cathedrals of Western Europe. They are also to be found in the expression of natural science and the more detailed understanding of the human psyche which has characterised the last thousand years of European history.

The quality known as " repose " in the ancient Greek is a manifestation of that serenity which

belongs to a people not yet disturbed by self-doubt, self-immolation and self-contempt. It is the extreme harmony of a mentality not yet shaken by tortures of introspection, or inner conflict, by what Goethe called "two souls throning within one bosom." The beauty of the Greeks is the beauty of men who have never in their wildest dreams beheld the horrors of Dante's Inferno. Poorer than the moderns in this respect, they consequently have the bliss which is partly ignorance, and this bliss is revealed in their art. Everything that has appeared in Western Europe since the fall of the Roman Empire is certainly less serene, less blissful, more foolish, perhaps, in its wisdom, than was the partial ignorance of the Greeks; but it is more fretful, more nervous, more subterranean and subcutaneous, more full of insight and second sight, and consequently, therefore, more disturbing.

Rodin was a supremely gifted exponent of this strange accretion received by the mind of man after the age of classic Greece, but not only did he see life more piercingly than his predecessors, he also discovered through hard manual toil and the incessant study of nature, a magic means whereby what he saw could be adequately communicated. I shall now attempt to describe what these means were.

The first thing that the layman requires to understand about sculpture is the fact that the carved or moulded figure, whether of marble or

terra-cotta, has been produced by a process the exact converse of Nature's. Nature works, from within, outwards. The seed germinates, expands, and produces the tree, the plant, or the animal, by a process of proliferation, by a sort of invasion of space, a sort of shouldering of a form into the external light, a cleaving of the air right and left by energy assuming tangible being. And natural objects retain throughout their existence the signs of having grown in this way. Now this is most significant, and it is a fact which, recognised by Rodin, taught him where the pitfalls in sculpture lay.

For what is sculpture? Is it not the production of a form by peripheral processes alone? Is it not therefore the converse of Nature's method? A man is a conglomeration of cells that have grown and pushed the air aside from an inner necessity. A sculpture of a man, however, is an object which has acquired shape from the outside, from surface treatment, as if by corrugations of its periphery. The natural form retains until the last the signs that it has grown outwards from inner necessity. Is it possible that sculpture, as representing the converse of the natural mode of formation, will also bear until the last the stamp of having grown from no inner necessity, but of having been pinched into existence, so to speak, from the outside?

Rodin's reply to this question was that all bad and ordinary sculpture retains until the end the signs of having been formed from the out-

side, rather than of having cleaved the air in expanding. According to Rodin, therefore, the radical problem of all good sculpture consisted in discovering how an object moulded from the outside could be made to look as if it had grown from an inner necessity. In other words, it consisted in so manipulating the medium of expression as to produce by art a form that seemed to be created by natural laws.

To understand Rodin and his work it is essential to appreciate this difference between life and sculpture, and between his sculpture and that of many of his predecessors and contemporaries; and to value his innovations it is necessary constantly to bear in mind that the problem with which he never ceased from being occupied was the problem as stated immediately above.

Very often Rodin used to say to me that he had been obliged, in order to solve this problem, to discipline himself into regarding all natural objects in a new way, and that it was only when he had succeeded in acquiring the habit of this unusual vision that he had begun to produce living sculpture. This new way consisted in feeling all surfaces and all terminal points—whether in a human or animal model—as the projected limits of certain masses, as the apices of given thicknesses, and not as planes lying lengthwise at right angles to the line of vision. "Look at every part of a given form," he would say, "as the limit of a thickness rather than a

surface in length, and every point in that form as the extremity of a diameter directed at you, rather than as a slope or plane stretching across your line of vision, and you will have grasped my method of seeing when I am modelling."

I cannot tell whether I have made this point sufficiently clear, but at any rate I found the explanation exceedingly illuminating, and by means of it I learned very soon to distinguish between the flat sculpture of a poor sculptor and the work that breathed life with all the baffling intensity that Rodin's did. Turning to his "Bourgeois de Calais," his "Penseur," and his "Creation of Adam," with this principle in my mind, I saw immediately how magically they gave the impression of having grown from an inner necessity, of having cleaved the air in their growth, instead of having received their form from the outside, and I began to grasp the peculiar power of his sculpture and the secret of its overwhelming mastery.

"The artist whose emotions enable him to see, to feel, and to represent this principle of natural growth," Rodin often said, "is *hors concours*. No mere copying of nature, and least of all, direct moulding by casts made upon the living model, can possibly supplant his method. For life thus violently seized, as it were, by plaster of Paris, has a trick of eluding its captor, and the results of all such attempts have been wooden and dead. Only the emotional vision of the artist can feel with sufficient intensity the

pulsating depths behind the surface; and to render these depths is not a problem of surface imitation, but one of conveying vitality cubically, that is to say, in thickness."

The immense difficulties of this problem may now, to some extent, be appreciated, and it will be seen that he who overcomes them is something very much more than a discoverer of a successful technique; he is a profound student who has wrested a secret from life itself. But Rodin had all the native equipment for such an undertaking. Studious and patient by nature, he was also a man of enormous physical energy and strength. He was, moreover, deeply interested in his problem. To observe life sedulously was a pastime of which he never wearied. Robbed by the civilisation in which he found himself of daily familiarity with the naked human form, which was vouchsafed to the Greeks and Romans, he defeated the limitations of his age by thronging his studios with models who wandered about it in a state of nudity under his indefatigable eyes. Paid by him to supply him with the spectacle of the nude figure, behaving with all the freedom of ordinary life, these models used not to " pose " in the usual sense of the word, but used to move about as they listed, only to be frozen into immobility by a word from him when they happened to have assumed a position requiring closer study. And this was only one of the means he used for solving the one great problem of his art.

It is not contended here that Rodin was always equally successful in moulding forms that appeared to have grown from an inner necessity. Some of his portrait busts, I think, fail in this respect. But wherever the spectator is startled by the sight of one of Rodin's figures, wherever he feels in contemplating it a catch in his breath that he cannot account for, he may be sure that he is before a sculpture in which this essential distinction between a natural and a manufactured object—in which this quiddity of real life—has been genially communicated to him. It is unmistakable. No one can miss it. It may offend by its intensity. A mind filled with recollections of flat and lifeless sculptures may possibly be shocked by the tremendous vitality represented; but indifference is out of the question.

So much for one aspect of Rodin's work—its fierce vitality. There is, however, another aspect quite distinct from this, and the problems involved in its mastery are quite as great. I refer to the movement and swing of Rodin's figures.

We have seen that he tried all his life to express in the sculptured form that quality of the natural form which consists in having grown outward from a centre, of having invaded space from an inner necessity. We have also seen that, in order to achieve this end, he disciplined himself to feel and understand all the surfaces of a form, not as planes in length, but as ex-

tremities of diameters pointing at him, as thicknesses vibrating with life through their whole volume.

Now comes a second principle. Superimposed on the vital first principle so brilliantly understood and conveyed by Rodin, we find in his sculpture also the principle of movement. His figures, already vital as the outcome of the first principle, are given the additional semblance of animation by being represented as carrying through a bodily movement. Even some of his portrait busts—the "Victor Hugo," for instance —have this additional movement wedded to their vital form, and always with the result that their resemblance to life is baffling in its intensity.

Once more this was a principle deeply studied by Rodin, and he pondered its laws to some purpose. Movement in nature involves progression from one position to another. But sculpture is fixed. Can this radical incompatibility ever be overcome? To seize the last movement made by a living form, which seems to be the only resource of the sculptor and painter, is not to represent movement. Because, if movement is progression from one position to another, to seize any moment in that progression is to represent not movement but rigidity. The camera seizes one moment in the progression of forms, and that is why instantaneous photographs of moving men and animals always look like frozen, contorted forms devoid

of animation. Apparently, then, there is a difficulty here that art cannot overcome. Just as in the case of the first principle we had the incompatibility between life and sculpture in the essential difference of their formation, so now we have a further incompatibility arising from movement. The sculptor with his marble, his clay, or his bronze, seems doomed to represent only immobility, because apparently he can seize only one moment in progression, and has to give the whole of the anatomical conditions of that one moment. But if this is so, one of the principal characteristics of life is wholly beyond the reach of the graphic arts; and there is no doubt that a large number of sculptors and painters, having perceived this impasse, have humbly prostrated themselves before it without making any attempt to escape. On the other hand, there are a large number too, who, without investigating thoroughly the principle involved, have evidently overcome the difficulty, as Verrocchio's " Bartolomeo Colleoni " and innumerable other genial sculptures and pictures are with us to prove.

Given the means of representing the fluency and freedom of real life in sculpture, the question was, how to capture movement ?

Now Rodin made a particular study of this problem, and it may be said that it never ceased to preoccupy him. Briefly stated, his conclusions and the application of these to his art were as follows. He perceived very soon that

any attempt to seize one moment alone in progression was fatal to the illusion of movement. This the camera proved convincingly enough. But could the camera be wrong? Obviously the question should take another form. We should ask: Is it the object of photography to give the illusion of animation? Clearly it is not. The camera is used for a different purpose. It is a scientific instrument of precision largely used, it is true, in recording mere identity for an unscientific purpose; but its most ardent advocate would scarcely argue that it was designed to convey an emotional representation of moving life. Only when it was used for the kinematograph did it give the illusion even of movement. But it could not solve the problem of giving this illusion in a single image. Evidently, then, the method of the photograph is the wrong one if the object is to give the illusion of life and movement by a single image.

Wherein, then, in this matter does the eye differ from the camera? It does so in being able to record without confusion the merging of one movement into another, the blending of one movement in progression with another movement. The eye sees the hind limbs of a horse in a given position, and then travels forward to the animal's fore-quarters, only to find that they no longer bear to the still vivid image of the hind limbs the proper relation for a possible co-ordinated natural movement. In this way two distinct positions become imprinted on the

mind as one, with the result that succession of movement is felt as a visible fact; for movement is a succession of positions, each of which is co-ordinated in itself, and no two of which can be fused naturally into one. Two positions, therefore, conceived as one, give the impression of movement even in the static sculpture or in the drawn outline. And that is why photographs of moving forms are so unsatisfactory to the spectator, and why conventional and artistic representation of moving forms, which are photographically wrong, and which are therefore condemned by inartistic pedants, are ever so much more convincing, both to the initiated and the uninitiated in matters of art—because they convey the impression of movement in the only possible way it can be conveyed in a single image—namely, by the fusing of two naturally distinct positions.

There is no need to point out the obvious truth that if the impression of movement is to be convincing the two unco-ordinated positions must not be too glaringly incompatible—that is to say, separated by too great an interval of time—otherwise a look of distortion would be the result. But, provided the two positions are sufficiently close in time for the last to follow naturally out of the first, their fusion will give the impression of movement.

This is the conclusion at which Rodin arrived, and, after proceeding to substantiate it by an appeal to those works of former artists in which

movement is successfully represented, and who may be defended against the photographic line of attack on the grounds that the latter is irrelevant, he applied the principle he had discovered to his own work. People have declared that there is sorcery in the way he depicts life; that the animation of his sculpture is almost diabolical in its realism. Can they be blamed, seeing that he applied to his sculpture the two formidable principles we have just examined ? If his technical ability was at all equal to his capacity for study and to his acute powers of reasoning, how could he fail to give startling representations of life ? When, therefore, we know, as we do know, that he was in addition a great master in the technique of his craft, we cannot be surprised that in the eighties and nineties of last century he took the artistic world of Europe by storm.

The reader who happens to be one of those who hitherto has not paid overmuch attention to sculpture or to the literature dealing with it, and who has therefore possibly found these matters put before him clearly for the first time in this chapter, ought now to turn to Rodin's sculpture and contemplate it with the knowledge which, I hope, my explanation has given him. If he does so, he will find that he is now able to understand and appreciate a good deal which otherwise would only have left him perplexed and uneasy.

Let us suppose, for the sake of example, he is

contemplating the bust of Victor Hugo. I select a bust, because the qualities of Rodin's sculpture are more obvious in his large sculptures and therefore more readily grasped. If, however, there ever was sorcery in the imparting of life to sculpture it is nowhere exhibited with greater effect on a small scale, and with more limited scope and means, than in this particular work. Note, for instance, the busyness of the whole expression, the lively and contrary twists of the moustache and beard, as if the jaws and cheeks had only just moved; the subtle accentuation of asymmetry in the eyes; the restless and diversified play of the smaller muscles of the brows, the boldness of the broader planes, and the absence of unessential detail, combined with the general impression of complete characterisation. Observe, too, the artful effect of bristling spirituality which proclaims at once the man of genius. Although nothing is weak or shirked, the treatment is simple. Despite the extreme mobility of the features, the head is massive, heavy, and is felt to be alive all through. At every point on its surface one is conscious of what Rodin was conscious of—the diameter directed at one and receding backwards through living matter. The intensity of expression in this mere image, the periphery of which appears to press outwards from an inner necessity, gives the illusion of life to a degree so baffling that it is difficult to believe that it has been formed from the outside. Never was Rodin

in a better mood than when he made this bust. It is equal to the finest work in the "Bourgeois de Calais" and the "Balzac." Many of his other busts can hardly stand beside it; but then it should be remembered that he was in his prime when he executed it. Victor Hugo died in 1885, and the bust was completed shortly before his death, when Rodin was a man of no more than four-and-forty.

It is unnecessary to accompany the reader any further round the Rodin collection, and I shall not refer to other examples of his work. All the principles and qualities which contributed to the peculiar beauty of his art are adequately displayed in this bust, and had Rodin done nothing else it would have been sufficient to place him in the front rank of modern sculptors.

When, however, it has been said that in Rodin we had an artist who, in addition to having studied life sedulously and conscientiously, also possessed the intellectual equipment to apply that study to framing the principles of his art, to wresting from the living form the secrets of its vital make-up, and to solving the riddle of imparting movement to static images, the range of his native endowments has by no means been exhausted. For in Rodin there is yet something beyond this apparent sorcery in the representation of life, and without this something more he could hardly have captivated us as he has.

Over and above all his formidable artistic

capacity and penetration, there was in Rodin an extraordinarily single-minded lover of humanity and worshipper of human beauty. He was happy contemplating the human form, happiest in depicting it; and he never wearied of these two occupations. He declared that the human form was the synthesis of all other forms, and that consequently human beauty incorporated all other beauties. To those who were tempted, as were many visitors—particularly English and American—to contest this statement, and to remind him of the fluid voluptuousness of the feline form, which they protested could hardly be paralleled by anything human, he would exclaim almost in anger: "Study the nude figure a little more! You never see the nude figure. How can you speak in that way? Contemplate it as I have done, and you will discover nothing in the animal world that is not surpassed by the most unpretentious laundry girl (*par la dernière des blanchisseuses*)."

But even this was not all. Over and above his intense love of the human form, which made his study of it a genuine passion, Rodin was possessed of a very wholesome taste. This has indeed been disputed; but surely the view I take is abundantly borne out even by an illustrated catalogue of his works. Never does he present us with anything sick or degenerate. Never does he select for representation the faintly exhausted type of the modern world, which is now so frequently chosen quite uncritically by

less vigilant modern sculptors. All his figures are patterns of health and vigour, or are at least up to the highest standard of health and vigour existing in his time. Almost all except the "Old Helmet-maker's Wife" and the "Bourgeois de Calais," in which he chose to portray old or middle age, breathe the breath of flourishing youth and unspent energy. His taste was, therefore, healthy in this sense, that he preferred to err on the side of gross splendour in human structure, than on the side of delicate and faintly morbid refinement. And thus he resisted one of the most potent influences, not only of his age and of his country, but above all of the great city in which he was born. For, all around him, there were opportunities enough for interest in the subtly morbid, hot-house products of a sophisticated ideal; and he never succumbed.

As an artist he probably ranks as the most thoughtful and most single-minded performer of his century. His naturally robust constitution having driven all his native gifts to the utmost limit of their development, he became in middle age an engine of such formidable power, that he easily towered above the greatest of his contemporaries. And no one knew better than these greatest contemporaries themselves how formidable his endowments were.

As a sculptor he is certainly the greatest product of the purely Gothic tradition. His work will remain as the finest example, in his century, of the successful attempt to free the

plastic medium from the limitations inherent in it. And, if it is ever felt that, in his frequently contorted forms, the efforts he made to give the illusion of life are hardly consonant with the conventional idea of monumental dignity, nothing will ever rob him of at least this claim to glory—that he portrayed the living form as no other sculptor of his century ever succeeded in portraying it.

In my own opinion—and this thought struck me more than once when I was at his side—he was what biologists understand as a throwback, a phenomenon of atavism, and the age from which he hailed belonged to that period in history when all Europe was busy with feverish zeal and unsparing energy in building the wonderful cathedrals which are at once the greatest glory and most noble triumph of the Christian inspiration. Only thus is it possible to appreciate some of the more moving aspects both of his personality and his work, and it is thus that I like to picture him—as indeed he pictured himself (a fact that can be documentarily proved)—standing aloof from the petty details of his nineteenth and twentieth century adaptations, divested even of the fame that his work brought him, and content to be absorbed entirely in and by his work, anonymous like the great sculptors of Notre Dame of Paris.

CHAPTER VII

RODIN'S PLACE IN THE HISTORY OF ART

FOURTEEN years ago, writing on the subject of Van Gogh, I observed that "all posthumous fame should be weighed in relation to the quality of the period that concedes it, and before we concur too heartily with the verdict of an age subsequent to the man it lionises, we ought, at least, to analyse that age and test its health, its virtues and its values."*

What I meant was that artistic success, even of the most universal kind, should be measured in relation to the people among whom it has been made, and is no more a final verdict concerning a man's value than is absolute failure. Thus, in a nation with a culture ascending from decade to decade, we should expect the great artistic success of yesterday to be regarded as the mediocrity of to-morrow; and in a nation with a culture descending from decade to decade, the mediocrity of yesterday to be regarded as the classic of to-morrow.

This is a principle that is too often overlooked. But it is very important. Posterity, no matter whether it is better in quality than its forbears or not, assumes the right of establishing a man's

* See my Introduction to *The Letters of a Post-Impressionist* (Constable and Co., Ltd., 1922), pp. xv, xvi.

value for all time. This is obviously, however, pure presumption. For posterity may in the interval have grown smaller in stature, for instance. What, then, would be the good of scoffing at a former age for having called A. small ? Perhaps in a former age A. really did appear small compared with his contemporaries.

This is the difficulty behind all art appreciation. We change, we grow either less or more mediocre, but our heritage of art treasures comes down unaltered. The problem in a nutshell is therefore this—were the people who smashed the furniture in the Paris Opera House when Wagner's operas were first performed there better people than the modern Parisians, who love Wagner, or were they inferior to them ?

Until we can answer this question, we cannot with certainty assume that Wagner is great, simply because the present generation thinks him so. The popular and even the expert's attitude to-day is that posthumous fame, such as Van Gogh's or Whistler's, necessarily proves that those who first condemned, or refused to appreciate, these men, were quite wrong and foolish, and that we alone are right who exalt them. This is easy and obvious, but not very profound.

Thus the act of " placing " artistic giants presupposes a static condition of stature, which is purely imaginary and fantastic; and all attempts at placing ought therefore to be strongly deprecated. The most that can be done is to explain

a man in relation to his time and his means, and in doing this, to resist, as far as possible, the influence of contemporary and recent criticism.

Now Rodin appeared at a time when the whole of European art was in the throes of a most serious and probably unprecedented crisis. The fact that the scene of the principal struggles in this crisis happens to be laid in France, and that the hardest problems were faced and grappled with—I do not say "solved"—by Frenchmen, should not, however, blind us to the fact that the crisis was in reality a world-wide one.

Indeed, so momentous were the decisions at which the champions in the struggle arrived, that the history of art might almost be said to fall naturally into two sections—that which preceded, and that which followed this critical period.

What had happened was this: the accepted authority concerning what was good and desirable in art, was suddenly suspected of having no knowledge whatsoever of its business and function. It was in a trice unmasked as a dragon of incompetence, cruelly and violently imprisoning the fair goddess of the arts, and withholding her beauty from the sight of men. It was even accused of prostituting the very treasure which it was its privilege to protect and to champion. And just as the Reformers of the sixteenth century had arraigned the Holy Catholic Church for subordinating religion to purely venal ends, so the revolutionaries in this

art crisis arraigned the Academy, the official school of art, for pretending an artistic zeal and infallibility for which it did not possess the most elementary qualifications.

The indictment, in a word, was this: the academic school was bankrupt, exhausted. It no longer consisted of artists with an exalted ideal and the fire of creation in their souls, but of hidebound, slavish imitators of the classic painters and sculptors. With its stuffy studio atmosphere and its studio lighting, with its artificial colouring, its antiquated traditions and its "subject" pictures and sculptures, it had degenerated into a body of merchants purveying oleographs or polished drawing-room pedestal sculpture—"mere illustrators," as Jacques called them.

Against the Academy were ranged all those malcontents who invariably make up the throng of the *refusés* in every age; but among their number there was here and there a man who burned with something more noble than resentment, who thought, indeed, that he knew the disease from which the Academy was suffering, and who there and then heroically undertook to cure it.

The body consisting of such individual reformers became the first Impressionists, the first secessionists, and the forbears in every sense of modern art.

They stood for many things which the academicians scorned—for air, for light, for what

they conceived as life, and, above all, for a new palette and a new technique.

Obviously the opportunity was a great one. The difference between these men and the academicians allowed of no compromise. But was the road the reformers took necessarily the best one ?

There can be no doubt that in 1860 art was at a very low ebb. It was divorced from the life of the period, and ruled by a classic convention which found no natural source of refreshment in the world about it. Moreover, it had lost that inspiration and love without which creation is impossible. Ingres, however, who is about the only academic celebrity of that day who has survived, shows that the situation was by no means hopeless. Which of the secessionists of the sixties could draw as Ingres drew ? Which of them could use colour as he used it in his " Chapelle Sixtine," or his " Stratonice " ? Which of them loved the beauty of the female form as he did ? Nevertheless, let it be admitted that he, too, had begun to fade into dusty artificiality and cold studio formalism. What was to be done ?

To effect a cure it is essential that the preliminary diagnosis should be accurate. How did the Impressionists diagnose the disease of art ? That was the whole crux of the matter, and it was here, I venture to submit, that they made their first blunder.

They were right in drawing their crosses on every academician's door, to warn the people

that there was plague within. But they had not the foggiest perception of the nature of that plague.

My own reading of the situation is as follows:

If art is the function of the more sensitive, and at the same time more constructive craftsmen of any age, then art products are most probably symptomatic. They reveal the condition of the society in which they are produced. And, since the inspiration of the highest art is man himself, or man's own creations—for landscape and animal painting ought really to hold a subordinate place*—we may rightly infer from art's bankruptcy, and from art's loss of inspiration and love, that man himself had probably ceased from being inspiring or lovable.

The art of the academicians of 1860 was therefore probably only a reflection of their age, of the manhood of their age, its ideals, its direction, its effort. Formalism is only a symptom. Loss of love and inspiration is not a sin, it is a reaction. When a loving or passionate act degenerates into a formality, it means that the old stimulus has ceased to provoke the natural spontaneous reactions. But, as Rodin always used to say (quoting, I believe, Carrière), "the creation of a work of art, like the procreation of life, is an act of passion and of love." If the old passion and love had

* For support of this statement, see my discussion in *Nietzsche and Art* on how landscape painting came into being.

vanished from the art of these academicians, was it wholly their fault, their crime ? What if the modern European, with his sordid civilisation of commerce and industry, had ceased to inspire true art ? Was not that a possible explanation ?

Besides, there is another aspect of the question. A national art functions under the rule of national values. An integrated culture, in which the same values pervade and invade every sphere of life, has this immense advantage over a chaotic culture, that there is no division of opinion concerning what is good, beautiful, or right. Artists take their values from their environment. It was not an artist who first said that mountains and rugged scenery were beautiful. It was a philosopher. Only after this philosopher's views had become popularised did the new valuation find its way into art. Thus it is possible to lay one's finger on the period in history when certain new valuations have arisen, and to show their ultimate acceptance by artists and the public. The artist turns with admiring eyes to that which his valuations have told him to admire. But he is by no means necessarily responsible for these valuations.

Thus, in an age of chaotic values there may be a clash of artistic doctrines and a struggle between artists, without the latter being in the least aware of the reasons for it. They are simply the expressions of different valuations, and reflect the chaos of their values.

Now as regards chaotic values, Europe in 1860 may not have been quite as bad as now, but that it was very bad indeed may be gathered from the state of politics, the state of religion and the state of philosophic thought. Nothing, however, is so stultifying to art as chaotic valuations, because, where there is chaos in values, the artist does not know where he stands. He must convert people to his view, instead of expressing himself to men already agreed regarding what is good and what is beautiful.

Artists, who are as a rule superficially initiated into the philosophy of their calling, do not know how dependent they are on values, and, if they have their dependence pointed out to them, will stoutly deny it. When the artist of the average kind sits down before a landscape or a particular type of human beauty, to paint, because he thinks it beautiful, he imagines that he has performed an individual and private act of valuation, quite original and independent. Those who are ever so little familiar with the history of European values, however, know that this is not so, and are aware that long before any painter or sculptor approaches his canvas or his clay he has already been tainted by certain valuations for which he is no more responsible than the man in the moon. But it is precisely these values that determine his inspiration, and guide him in the direction where he will find it.

Where such values are chaotic, therefore, I

repeat, he does not and cannot know where he stands.

A stultification of art may, therefore, quite conceivably be the outcome of chaotic values. In fact, it almost always is contemporaneous with chaotic values. And the abysmal depths into which art has sunk to-day, are to be ascribed chiefly to the fact that our present values are even more chaotic than the values of 1860.

There were, therefore, according to my view, two possible explanations of the stultification of academic art in 1860:

(*a*) The fact that the modern man of Europe had ceased to be inspiring, and (*b*) the chaos of values.

Needless to say, the secessionists among the painters and sculptors of that day were quite unaware of these possible causes. If they had been aware of them they would have acted differently. But then they would hardly have been painters and sculptors.

What might they have done had they known ? They might have formed themselves into the apex of a popular movement for reform—*reform on integrating lines, having as one of its objects the regeneration of man.* The integration would have led to uniform values, which are the prerequisite of all high art; while the regeneration of man would have restored to art its adequate inspiration.

But what, in fact, did they do ? (We must remember that, they were rebels against a con-

vention. They concentrated upon air, atmosphere, light, the composition and colouring of a picture, the palette of the painter, the play of complementaries, the breaking up of light, etc. —trifles; but they seemed important.

At a moment when society and man were both in a parlous condition, as the products of art very cogently proved; at a time when the chaos of values and the degeneracy of the modern European made a lofty art tendency almost impossible, these revolutionaries, who thought themselves the only hope of the art world, concentrated upon questions of mere technique—studio problems, in fact;* and, what is more, came forward with their new-fangled doctrines about light, atmosphere, harmonies and the reformed palette, with the assurance of saviours, confident that they were rescuing the world.

It is not denied that they effected many a valuable reform of the technique of painting, and that they introduced a freshness and animation into the moribund art of the sixties, which were exceedingly welcome. Nobody would condemn their technical innovations as fruitless or futile. All I claim is that they did not graze the surface of the actual cause of the trouble. That cause or those causes are still operating.

* See Camille Mauclair, *The French Impressionists* (Duckworth and Co.), p. 10, where the author, writing as a friend of the Impressionists, speaks of Impressionism as "being beyond all a technical reaction."

We still have the chaos of values, only intensified; and we still have degenerate manhood, but more degenerate. The Impressionists, secessionists, and Post-Impressionists from Manet and Whistler to Van Gogh and Cézanne, have come and gone without modifying by a hair's-breadth the root of the trouble which they imagined they were removing for all time.

I have said that man himself is the proper inspiration of the highest art. He is, in fact, the eternal subject of the painter as of the sculptor. If he fails, if he ceases to inspire, art itself must necessarily lose its power. Another alternative is that the artist may try to turn elsewhere for his inspiration, to another continent, to another world.

Two great figures among the body of the secessionists perceived this truth and acted upon it. But they were exceptions. They were Van Gogh and his friend Gauguin. Both of them had undergone the influence of Impressionism, and both of them had felt its lack of humanity, its sterile preoccupation with merely technical problems.* "I want to paint humanity, humanity and again humanity," wrote the former; "I love nothing better than this series of bipeds, from the smallest baby in long clothes to Socrates."† And later he wrote: "Oh dear! It seems ever more and more clear to me that mankind is the root of all life,"‡ and, "I should

* They are actually classified as Post-Impressionists.

† *Letters of a Post-Impressionist*, p. 85. ‡ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

like to prepare myself for ten years by means of studies for the task of painting one or two figure pictures."*

But in his heart of hearts Van Gogh knew that his inspiration would be hard to find, for he shared Gauguin's profound contempt of the white man of modernity. In Gauguin this feeling was so powerful that, coupled with the artist's belief that man was the only proper subject of art, it forced him to leave France and seek in savage climes the inspiration he longed for. Thus he was driven like a haunted explorer all over the world, until at last in Tahiti and the Marquesas Islands he thought he had found what he wanted. There he not only painted the natives, but also championed their cause against the hated white man who had failed to inspire him; and was arrested and heavily fined for his action. But he had not found peace. Like the more technical preoccupations of his brother Impressionists, the savage is but a poor substitute for the highest subject of art, the civilised white man, and since Gauguin perceived the latter's degeneracy, and unfitness any longer to inspire him, he was really an artist without employment.

Nevertheless, he and Van Gogh had at least an inkling of part of the cause of art's decrepitude. They had probed deeply enough to see that the wrongness of man had probably something to do with the wrongness of art itself.

* *Letters of a Post-Impressionist*, p. 152.

The mere suspicion of such a discovery, however, had entirely escaped the earlier Impressionists and secessionists from the Academy. On the contrary, far from seeing that the chaos of values and the decline of man had led to the crisis in art, these enthusiasts, as we have seen, proceeded not only to concentrate upon technique, but, if you please, to proclaim that the subject in a picture or sculpture did not matter! Because the highest subject of art had decayed and thereby discredited art, these innovators, instead of perceiving what had actually happened, proceeded to argue that it was the idea of the "subject" in itself that was wrong. And the conclusion they drew was that the subject did not matter. What did matter was arrangement, composition, the treatment of light, the colours on one's palette, etc.

Manet went so far as to proclaim the astonishingly negative doctrine that "*the principal person in a picture is the light.*"*

Thus at one stroke the whole of the human relations of art were cut adrift. Art became a question of optics, chemistry, of the scientific treatment of planes. The way the laws of the physical sciences governed the production of the ultimate effect, became the subject of passionate interest and discussion. To understand these laws, and to carry them into practice pictorially, became the "end" of art, instead of merely

* "*Le personnage principal dans un tableau c'est la lumière.*"

art's means. Thus Camille Mauclair concludes: "Atmosphere is the real subject of the picture, and whatever is represented upon it only exists through its medium."*

To read a description of the problems that fired these fellows, who were the alleged saviours of art in 1860, is to be reminded of a treatise on physics, and they well justified Gauguin's fine words upon the whole movement. Writing to Charles Morice in April, 1903, Gauguin said:

"*Nous venons de subir, en art, une très grande période d'égarement, causée par la physique, la chimie, la mécanique et l'étude de la nature. Les artistes ayant perdu tout de leur sauvagerie, n'ayant plus d'instinct, on pourrait dire d'imagination, se sont égarés dans tous les sentiers pour trouver des éléments producteurs qu'ils n'avaient pas la force de créer.*"†

Gauguin was right. These artists had lost their instincts, their rugged stamina (*sauvagerie*). Having been robbed, by the chaos of values and man's degeneracy, of their proper environment and inspiration, and having failed to see the causes of their condition, they created a sort of factitious excitement for themselves by concentrating upon petty studio problems, which, after all, never emerged from the category of "means." Besides, there was something Puritanical and negative both towards life and humanity in thus banishing the subject from

* *French Impressionists*, p. 26.

† See the *Mercure de France*, vol. xlviii., 1903, p. 105.

the picture, and making the interest centre round light, atmosphere, colour schemes, etc. And it was not therefore surprising that among the secessionists of the Impressionist period there should have been found an American, whose Puritanical traditions must have inclined him wholeheartedly to embrace the new art creed.

Among the painters whose pictures were rejected with Manet's at the Salon of 1863, were not only Monet's, Renoir's, Legros', and Jongkind's, but also Whistler's—Whistler, the painter who, until the end, was to retain that negative interest in mere harmonies, arrangements, symphonies and variations which exalted colour schemes (or, in his case, really schemes of variegated blacks and greys) to the rank of subjects in his pictures.*

Thus the whole movement against the decadence of academic art, which might have been so fruitful of good far-reaching reforms both in society and humanity, lost itself in a sort of art-students' insurrection against certain studio

* I am not suggesting that Whistler was either consciously or doctrinally Puritanical; for the memorable Horsley incident (see *Pall Mall Gazette*, December, 1885) would be sufficient to demonstrate that he was not. But the fact that his Puritan and Scottish ancestry probably influenced his taste in art, and led him to accept unhesitatingly the most negative aspects of the Reformers' principles in 1860, is shown not only in his pictures and their austere, almost gloomy appearance, but also in his insistence on concentrating interest on the least human and the least living elements in a work of art.

conventions. Its leaders, satisfied with confining the whole of their demands to matters of means, went off on a side-track that was at once sterile, and hostile to the highest aims of art. They were, after all, no better than their age, although they have been considered far beyond it. In fact, one of the group actually acknowledges that they were essentially of their age, and wished to be so.* But for a while the public, tickled by their new combinations of colour, their " atmosphere," their new " arrangements " and their odd titles, imagined that it was witnessing a prodigious renaissance of the arts.

The fact that such beginnings must inevitably lead to the absurdities of Futurism and Cubism, never occurred to these innovators, who exalted light, atmosphere, colour harmonies and mere patterns, to the rank of subjects in their pictures; but just as little did it occur to them that they had, as Gauguin was later to point out, lost their instincts, and gone over to a Puritanism of outlook which is the very antithesis of great artistic creation.

But although the Puritan and pessimist were pleased, the lover of life was revolted, and remains revolted until this day, by the revolutionaries of the sixties. The Academy retaliated feebly to their indictment. It refused their

* See Edmond Claris, *De l'Impressionisme en Sculpture* (Paris, 1902), p. 3, where the author quotes Raffaëlli as having said: " *Avant tout nous avons voulu être de notre temps* " (" Above all we wished to belong to our age ").

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works *en bloc*, heaped ridicule upon their principles, accused them of "madness," and declared them guilty of systematic negation of the "laws of beauty," which they pretended to defend.*

This, too, was a misunderstanding; and thus both parties groped in darkness, though neither made any progress in the direction which alone could save art. The reason was that the salvation of humanity and the salvation of art were identical as problems, and the first essential step to the discovery of this fact had occurred to neither of the contending groups.

The ultimate popular success, nay, triumph, of these Impressionists in France of the latter half of the nineteenth century, was, like the success of Schopenhauer, due to some extent to the pessimism that pervaded all classes—that pessimism which no longer wished to be reminded of man and life, but was glad to have its attention drawn to other matters, whether technical novelties or unaccustomed scenes and characters.

In the same way, the ultimate success of Whistler in England was due to the latent Puritanism of his outlook, and to the Puritanism of those to whom he appealed. This is what the American had in common with the Londoners who were originally startled by his odd canvases and their still more odd titles, and that is what enabled him finally to conquer them.

One does not require to have read Whistler's

* *The French Impressionists*, p. 5.

Ten o'Clock, or his letter to *The World* (May 22, 1878), in which he deliberately and petulantly proscribes life and humanity from art; neither does one need to have digested his innumerable and fanatically earnest remarks about the importance of his particular technique, in order to come to this conclusion. All one needs is a little health and love of life, and a calm dispassionate study of his many "Arrangements," "Nocturnes," and "Symphonies."*

* I think I was the first to point out, fourteen years ago, certain curious resemblances between the American Puritan Whistler, and the German Puritan Immanuel Kant, in the matter of their æsthetic doctrine. There is no reason to believe that Whistler had ever read Kant, but they had something in common which accounts for the similarity of their views, and that was their Scottish blood. Kant, whose name was really Cant, was, as everybody knows, of Scottish descent, and Whistler, through his mother, traced his ancestry to the McNeills of Skye. To read the *Ten o'Clock*, and then to turn to the *Kritik der Urteilskraft* is immediately to become aware of the kinship of the two men. In the latter, for instance, Kant declares that a pure judgment of what is beautiful can be concerned only with form and not with content and in another striking passage he says: "In painting, sculpture; and in all plastic arts—in architecture and gardening, in so far as they are beautiful arts—the *design* is the essential thing, and here it is not what gratifies in sensation, but what pleases by means of its form, that is the fundamental prerequisite of taste. The colours which illuminate the masses belong to the charm; they may, indeed, enliven the object of sensation, but they cannot make it beautiful and worthy of being looked at." In fact, the subject does not matter. Much of Kant's dissertation is a continuous restatement and elaboration of this position. It reads very much like the *Ten o'Clock*.

Thus the secessionist and Impressionist movement in art of the seventh decade of the nineteenth century, which had such promising antecedents in men like Chardin, Watteau, Latour, Fragonard, Saint-Aubin, etc., ended only in making the reputation and material success of such men as Renoir, Whistler, Monet, and one or two others, and in introducing certain technical reforms into modern painting. Apart from that, it left art very much as it found it, except that in the interval values have grown even more chaotic than they were, and man, the subject of art, probably more degenerate. But Chardin remains unsurpassed, and, in my opinion, not even equalled by any one of the revolutionaries. His wonderful cubic sense, his conscientiousness, and his distinction—none of these qualities reappeared in his followers. And the start must be made afresh, but with less feverish concentration upon side-issues.

I may be accused of being unduly hard on these pioneers who turned what might have been a positive movement of revolt against a moribund art into a mere craftsman's squabble about studio methods. But I would remind the reader that the standpoint I am advancing is by no means the popular or even the expert one, and that, therefore, I am perhaps entitled to state it a little more forcibly than I should need to have done had it represented the general point of view.

Nevertheless, let us give honour where honour

is due, and let us acknowledge frankly that, in men like Claude Monet, the real founder of the Impressionist movement—for his discoveries and practical application of them not only precede Manet's, but the very word "Impresisonism" is also of his coinage*—Renoir, Manet, and Degas, a certain charming novelty of outlook emerges from their reformed methods, which is at once refreshing and stimulating. No doubt they purged the studios of their day of much that was both stale and worthless, not forgetting even the bitumen with which every canvas was smothered, and introduced air and light into corners whence both had long been banished. All this, however, falls short of the reforms that were needed to put art on a healthy footing again, and it is in this sense only that their fight with the Academy was abortive and sterile.

Now the question is, what was Rodin's share in this movement of the sixties, and what was his contribution to the gains of the revolutionary party ?

We have seen that he was in every sense a secessionist, an opponent of the Academy. From his very first encounter with the official custodians of art in France, he perceived his utter strangeness and antipathy towards them, and he retained his attitude until the end. But we must be careful not to confound his opposition to official art with that of the Impressionist painters. It was much more sensible and pro-

* *The French Impressionists*, p. 18.

found. The artists inaugurated a reaction against the so-called "Græco-Latin" obsessions of the academicians of their day. Their cry was: "*Qui nous délivrera des Grecs et des Romains?*"*

Rodin, as a profound student of his particular craft, however, could hardly be expected to add his voice to the chorus that was chanting that appeal. Indeed, the very first piece of sculpture which he submitted to the Academy in 1864 was, as we have seen, entirely Greek in its conception and fashioning. He was much too earnest an admirer of the Greeks, and had learnt too much from them, to be able to desire their proscription. He was, however, an avowed enemy of the neo-Greek, the pseudo-Greek, the Greek that was Greek only in name, which in the France of his day was leading to a reduplication *ad infinitum* of heroic and artificial postures, assumed by stone and marble figures that looked for all the world as if they had been stamped out to pattern.

This sculpture, which was largely under the influence of the late Italian school, was elegant and polished, but bore no relation whatsoever to life and humanity, owing chiefly to its blatant falsity, its unconscientious execution, and the lack of love and knowledge evident in its production. Rodin accused it of being presentable only on one side, and declared that the moment

* "Who will deliver us from the Greeks and the Romans?"

the spectator began to walk round it, its faults became obvious. It was not modelled but faked, and its smooth cardboard surfaces were a travesty of life and an offence to the discerning eye.

Men like Rude, Carpeaux and Barye had said much the same a generation previously, but they had been scorned. Rude had created a scandal with his group " Le Chant du Départ," which is now considered the jewel among the four groups decorating the Arc de Triomphe; and when Carpeaux had submitted his monument representing the five parts of the globe, he was asked to take it home again and to finish it with the help of files and emery paper. Barye was also laughed at for his animals.

All this was not precisely the fault of the public, but of the unconscientious artists who had systematically vitiated its taste.

Thus Rodin came upon a world in which his particular art was also in the custody of pontiffs unworthy of their charge. As he often said: " They hold the keys of heaven, and will allow no deserving soul to enter. But they themselves can never enter either !" And like the Impressionist painters, he devoted his life to fighting them.

From this point onwards, however, his likeness to the Impressionist painters ceases, for although he lived to fight the Academy in several successful engagements, his aims and his means were different from those of the painters, and the

ultimate position he occupied bore but a remote likeness to theirs. Where this difference lay may not be immediately apparent, and the fact that he has often been loosely referred to as an Impressionist sculptor, shows that many have not seen it. Nevertheless the distinction can be plainly stated, and it will be our business to define it.

We have seen that the Impressionist and secessionist painters of 1860 turned what might have been a positive movement of reform into a negative campaign, in favour of a new technique and the banishing of the subject from the picture. And we have beheld men like Manet, Whistler and Monet, maintaining either that light, or that colour arrangement and design, or that atmosphere was the chief interest in a painting. The whole movement, as we have already shown, thus logically terminated in the sterility of Cubism and Futurism, and was bound to do so, leaving art where it was in 1860, only with a reformed palette.

With Rodin, however, while technical reforms take a very important and valuable place, they were applied to a different object. They were used for the purpose of attaining to greater fidelity in the representation of the living form. They aimed at rescuing the living form from people who had become mere caricaturists in marble and stone. Moreover—and this is more important still—let it be remembered that Rodin never dreamed of anything so silly as to raise

his technical innovations to the rank of "ends." He never dignified them with the status of ultimate *desiderata*. They were always subordinated to his one great object, which was the artistic representation of life itself, with the maximum amount of convincing power.

Rodin never spoke of "modelling" or "design," or of "arrangement" as the principal interest of a statue. He believed until the end that the human body was the highest subject of the plastic arts,* and that its faithful representation was the proudest achievement of the sculptor.

Thus, technical preoccupations led him to positive rather than to negative results, where life and humanity were concerned. Without understanding any more thoroughly than the painters did, the deepest causes of art's decrepitude,† he nevertheless did not stultify the whole of his efforts towards reform by abandoning what the academicians with their formalism had discredited.

The academicians had made the subject picture and the subject sculpture a mockery. But Rodin's corrective was not to laugh at them and to ban the subject altogether. It was to show them how the subject could be so reverently treated as to be honourably restored to its proper position in the plastic arts.

* See Camille Mauclair, *Trois Crises de l'Art Actuel* (Paris, 1906), pp. 38-39.

† But even on this question Rodin had much to say that was both profound and closely approaching the truth.

We have seen with what sedulous pains he studied the mere craft of his calling, how he investigated every aspect of the technique of sculpture. It was all done with the one object of giving adequate expression to his love of the human form. Van Gogh said: "I should like to prepare myself for ten years, by means of studies, for the task of painting one or two figure pictures."* Rodin might have pronounced the same words about his studies in the technique of sculpture. Only. instead of ten years, he took twenty-two—from 1855 to 1877.

The odious misrepresentation of life and the human form by academicians did not therefore drive Rodin to absurd and negative extremes. On the contrary, it impelled him to rescue the discredited subject from the ignominy into which it had fallen, and incidentally to vindicate Greece and her sculpture against her incompetent imitators.

It was Rodin's ultimate triumph to teach these "Græco-Latin" academicians what true Greek methods were, and to embody in his sculpture the principles which made not only Greek but also Gothic sculpture the living thing that it is. And here, again, he departed from the painters, who, far from teaching the academicians how to restore the subject of art to the dignity it deserved, proceeded in their reforms deliberately to turn their backs on everything the Academy had discredited.

* See p. 176, *ante*.

In this sense the painters were, as Raffaëlli admitted, essentially "men of their age"—that is to say, opportunists and democrats. Because it is typical of both modern opportunism and democracy, that every institution which is discredited (not through any fault inherent in its nature, but through those who mismanage it), whether it be aristocracy, monarchy, or religion, must be torn down and sacrificed, instead of being reconstituted and constructively restored.

That is why, in his modesty and honesty, Rodin said: "*Je ne suis qu'un ouvrier. Je n'invente rien, je retrouve. Ce que je fais parait nouveau parcequ'on a perdu de vue le but et les moyens de mon art.*"*

He never claimed that he had introduced anything fresh, but that he had rediscovered what had long been lost by the academicians. The Greeks had possessed it, and so also had the Gothics. But in the official art of his day it was entirely lacking. His contribution to the secessionist movement was therefore an act of restoration. He was more of a revivalist than a revolutionary.

"*On prend pour une innovation.*" he said, "*un retour aux lois des antiques.*"†

Thus he was more Greek than the Græco-Latin academicians, and at the same time more Gothic than they ever dared to be. He read the secret of the life that animated the antique.

* *Trois Crises de l'Art Actuel*, p. 42. † *Ibid.*

"*L'antique est la vie même*," he said,* and he regarded the ancients as the greatest, most earnest and most admirable students of Nature. Thus, in a sense, his reactionary efforts consisted largely in an attempt to recover an attitude of reverence towards Nature.

"*Quand on suit la Nature avec un fidèle amour*," he declared, "*on en obtient tout.*"† The academicians had left their best school, Nature; hence their mistakes and their artistic bankruptcy!

Now it is interesting to note that, here once more, he stands out in strong contrast to his contemporary secessionist, Whistler; for Whistler had taught a very different doctrine.

"That Nature is always right," said the American artist, "is an assertion artistically as untrue as it is one whose truth is universally taken for granted. Nature is very rarely right, to such an extent even, that it might almost be said that Nature is usually wrong."‡

When Rodin returned to Belgium from his study of the Renaissance artists and the ancients in Italy, he came to the conclusion, as we have already seen, that the secret of living sculpture was not to imitate his predecessors, as the academicians were trying to do, but to devote himself humbly to the study of Nature; and he tells us that even at Sèvres, when he was

* *Trois Crises de l'Art Actuel*, p. 56. † *Ibid.*, p. 49.

‡ See the *Ten o'Clock* (4th edition of *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies*), p. 143.

attempting to design new shapes for vases, it was again Nature, and not his imagination, which was his surest guide.

"Years ago," he said, "I tried to discover new shapes for vases in the manufactory of Sèvres. But I could not find the beauty of proportion and line that satisfied me, because I relied in my experiments too exclusively upon my imagination. Since then, however, I have made many drawings of the female form, and one female figure, in its synthesis, supplied me with a magnificent shape for a vase, with lines that were both true and harmonious. It is not a question of creating. Creating, improvising—these are words that have no meaning. Everything is to be found in what surrounds us. Everything exists in Nature."*

This is much more reminiscent of the later Impressionist, Van Gogh, than of the earlier men and Whistler; and if we acknowledge that Rodin produced anything valuable by his method, we must accord some honour to his doctrine and the means whereby he realised it.

Camille Mauclair, relying, I think, a little too completely on Rodin's technical indebtedness to Hellenic art, would have us believe that he was more Greek than Gothic. I can hardly think that time will substantiate this classification. A close study of both the Greeks and the Gothics, particularly of the sculptures of the first cathedrals in France and southern Germany—the

* *Trois Crises de l'Art Actuel*, pp. 49-50.

tomb of Philippe Pot, for instance—seems to point much more convincingly to Rodin as the heir of the mediæval artists who were to remain anonymous.

As Carrière said of Rodin: "He was born too late to take part in the building of our cathedrals, but, by his ardent sympathy, he is nevertheless one with the eternal forms of Nature."*

We must remember his nationality, and that so shrewd a critic and friend as Roger Marx, failing to see anything exotic in his work, called Rodin "a continuator of the French tradition in sculpture."† He can only be a continuator, however, if he derives, as Mauclair points out, through men like Rude, Houdon, Pigalle, Couston, Puget and Germain Pilon, from the French primitives and the Gothics; and if Camille Mauclair admits that the spirit of Rodin's art is entirely French,‡ and himself perceives a purely autochthonous origin to the great sculptor's art, it is difficult to understand his other statement to the effect that Rodin's art has derived from the Greeks and not from the Gothics.

I feel that there is some unaccountable contradiction here, and since I incline to the view that Rodin, while using Greek methods and adopting especially the Greek artifice of de-

* See the Illustrated Catalogue to the Special Exhibition of Rodin's work at the 1900 Exhibition.

† Lawton, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

‡ *Trois Crises de l'Art Actuel*, p. 66.

liberately amplified modelling,* was more Gothic than Greek, I cannot help suspecting that so conscientious and careful a critic as Mauclair would hardly have been guilty of so grave an inconsistency had not the strength of the Gothic elements in Rodin's sculpture caused him to waver irresolutely between the two alternatives.

So much, then, for Rodin's contribution to the nineteenth-century revolt against the Academy. It now remains to mention but one other prominent aspect of his life-work, and my task will be done. I refer, of course, to his famous drawings. Concerning these and their artistic import, I have already said almost everything that required saying, but there is one question about them which I have not yet answered, and that is, *how*, if, as I maintain, they were never intended as works of art fit for public scrutiny or for the eye of the connoisseur, *did they succeed in obtaining the vogue which they undoubtedly did obtain in the latter years of Rodin's life?*

I have never seen this question answered, and I shall therefore attempt to answer it in my own way.

First of all, we must remember that Rodin's rise to fame as a sculptor was, as we have seen, the outcome of a series of struggles in which his

* According to Mauclair, this deliberate amplification of modelling was in the proportion of 5/4 to 4. See p. 40 of *Trois Crises de l'Art Actuel* for a complete discussion of this question.

enemies and supporters on the Press were constantly measuring their steel. Men like Geoffroy, Arsène Alexandre, Mauclair and Mirbeau were among his earliest and most doughty defenders, and they had against them the whole front of that Press which represented both the popular and the academic view of what sculpture should be. The gross injustices to which he was at first subjected, and of which the misrepresentation by vulgar and ignorant critics of his "Age of Bronze" was but one among many flagrant examples, fired the enthusiasm of his small band of supporters, and very soon they were performing prodigies of æsthetic interpretation and vindication on his behalf. Searching for new, lucid and convincing terms, in a language already rich in the terminology of art, they achieved genuine feats of analysis and definition in their endeavour to demonstrate to the public at large, and over the head of his enemies, the purport and value of Rodin's art. To read some of these vindications now is to marvel at the ingenuity and courage of these early champions who, with only Rodin's laconic and semi-mystic self-apology to guide them (for Rodin's ultimate lucidity about his own aims and mannerisms was largely their work), succeeded at last in compelling the public both of France and the rest of Europe to treat their distinguished friend at least with decent consideration.

Rodin, however, was a generous man. He was not the kind of climber who ultimately

spurns the shoulders upon which he has clambered to eminence. He was full of gratitude for the body of devoted admirers, among whom, after a while, two of the leading bankers of Paris could be numbered, and he naturally cast about him for some means wherewith to reward them in a manner at once suitable to their station and compatible with his own slender means. We can imagine him, therefore, urging them with his customary disregard for money, to select from his productions anything that they might fancy. But a sculptor, unlike a painter or an author, has no *bibelots* to distribute among his followers. A sculpture of stone, marble, bronze, or terra-cotta, represents a sum of money which no thoughtful man would dream of accepting from a needy friend. Thus, when the inevitable offer came, we can picture these ardent champions declining Rodin's more generous presents and taking refuge, in their dilemma, in the choice of some small signed drawing, which, while it gave them a token of the sculptor's esteem, did not at the same time ruin his finances. Of course, in later years, when he became wealthy, Rodin often insisted on their accepting more substantial favours. But I am speaking of the early days, when they knew that he had to tread warily.

Now, it was only natural that, when once these enthusiastic admirers had become possessed of Rodin's drawings, they should have spared no pains to extol the beauty and value

of their acquisition to all those about them who were in any way interested. Decent appreciation alone of an artist's gifts would sufficiently account for their inclination to overvalue what had been given to them, and to exalt—far beyond their actual artistic merit—the small rewards which, in their modesty, they had been content to accept. At all events, this is undoubtedly what must have occurred. And it was this well-meaning gratitude, and also, I fear, the venality, too, in certain cases, of his supporters, which made them bestow exaggerated praise on possessions whose value was more of a sentimental than an artistic order.

This, I think, explains to some extent the genesis in France of the vogue for Rodin's drawings; and when we bear in mind that most of his supporters were literary men, in whose power it lay to make and unmake artistic fame, the explanation does not seem an improbable one. Without it, it is difficult to understand how productions which held the place that Rodin's drawings held in their producer's own estimation, could have so far outreached their modest beginnings, as to be regarded by the world at large as almost as important as his sculpture. That this ultimate and unexpected result staggered Rodin himself, is a fact I have already mentioned,* and it is among the most curious in the psychology of hero-worship and fame.

* See p. 133, *ante*.

Summing up, therefore, we have seen that, whereas Rodin was a contemporary of the famous secessionists, some of whom founded the French Impressionist school of 1860, he was in many respects more profound, more formidable and more artistically learned than any of them. At least, with him the movement of reform and revolt was not allowed to dwindle into a mere technical squabble, a mere preoccupation with means and methods. He never set up a technical expedient as an end in itself. Free from any taint either of Puritanism or pessimism, he could not exalt to the rank of chief interest in a piece of sculpture an abstract principle or feature of it which was no more than a *sine qua non* of artistic production, and he concentrated upon Nature, and particularly human nature, both for his inspiration and for his schooling. He taught the " Græco-Latin " academicians the science of their art; but he performed this feat, not as a dry-as-dust scholar, but as a passionate lover of beauty, devoted to his calling. He did not break with tradition and grow excited about trifles, but rediscovered what the academicians had lost, and the strangeness of the things he reinstated consisted more in their kinship with the glorious past than in anything new that his fingers added to them.

I need not reiterate how, in this respect, he differed from his contemporaries among the painters. Enough has been said on this subject. Suffice it, therefore, to say, that in the great

movement which, beginning about the year 1860, continued until the advent of the Cubists and Futurists, the part played by Rodin was probably among the most distinguished and most valuable, because it led back to life and humanity, and, above all, to a healthy view of both. He himself was shocked by the first signs of Cubism and Futurism—a sufficient proof of his lack of real sympathy with the sterile principles which had logically led up to them; and although, as a sculptor, he could not be expected to detect the errors of the first Impressionist painters, who were his friends, the line he ultimately adopted proved how radically he disgreed with them.

Rather than call him the sculptor of Impressionism, therefore, which, to my mind, owing to the shallow school of Impressionist painters, has such unhappy associations, I should prefer to class him as a mediævalistic reactionary who, with all the thoroughness and ardour of the mediæval artist in his constitution, strove to re-establish in modern France the spirit which had ruled his ancestors of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Had there been one painter among the secessionists, who were his friends, who could have compared with him for earnestness, profundity and artistic scholarship, it is probable that the history of pictorial art during the last seventy years would have been a very different one.

When referring reverently one day to the

language and spirit which was familiar to the ancient sculptors of the French cathedrals, Rodin said: "To rediscover that language and that spirit, we should have to stretch our arms far back into the past—but they would not have to be stretched towards earth, but towards heaven."*

This was more or less the mood of his life. It is no exaggeration to say that it elevated him head and shoulders above his fellow-artists.

* *Trois Crises de l'Art Actuel*, p. 46.

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